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# THE GOAD

A HUMAN STORY OF THE LAST GREAT WEST  
in the early part of the Twentieth Century  
based mainly on facts

BY

NORMAN M. PLUMMER

LONDON:

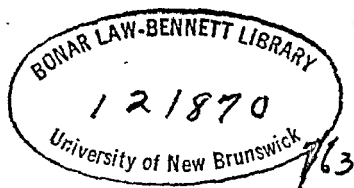
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To  
DOROTHY S. NOW DOROTHY P.

You met me in the Valley of Despair—  
Wherein I'd roamed since losing life's sweet goad—  
From thence you led me to the mountain tops,  
And let me gaze upon the sun-kissed road.

With hand still clasping mine, you led me on  
Until the strength-to-win nerved me anew;  
The broken hopes were patched—fresh life I breathed,  
And peace at last I found again, through you.

And in the calmness of the passing time,  
You placed at my desire both scroll and screed;  
And if my hand not falter—mind clear keep—  
My readers shall be judges of your deed.

THIS BOOK IS TENDERLY DEDICATED



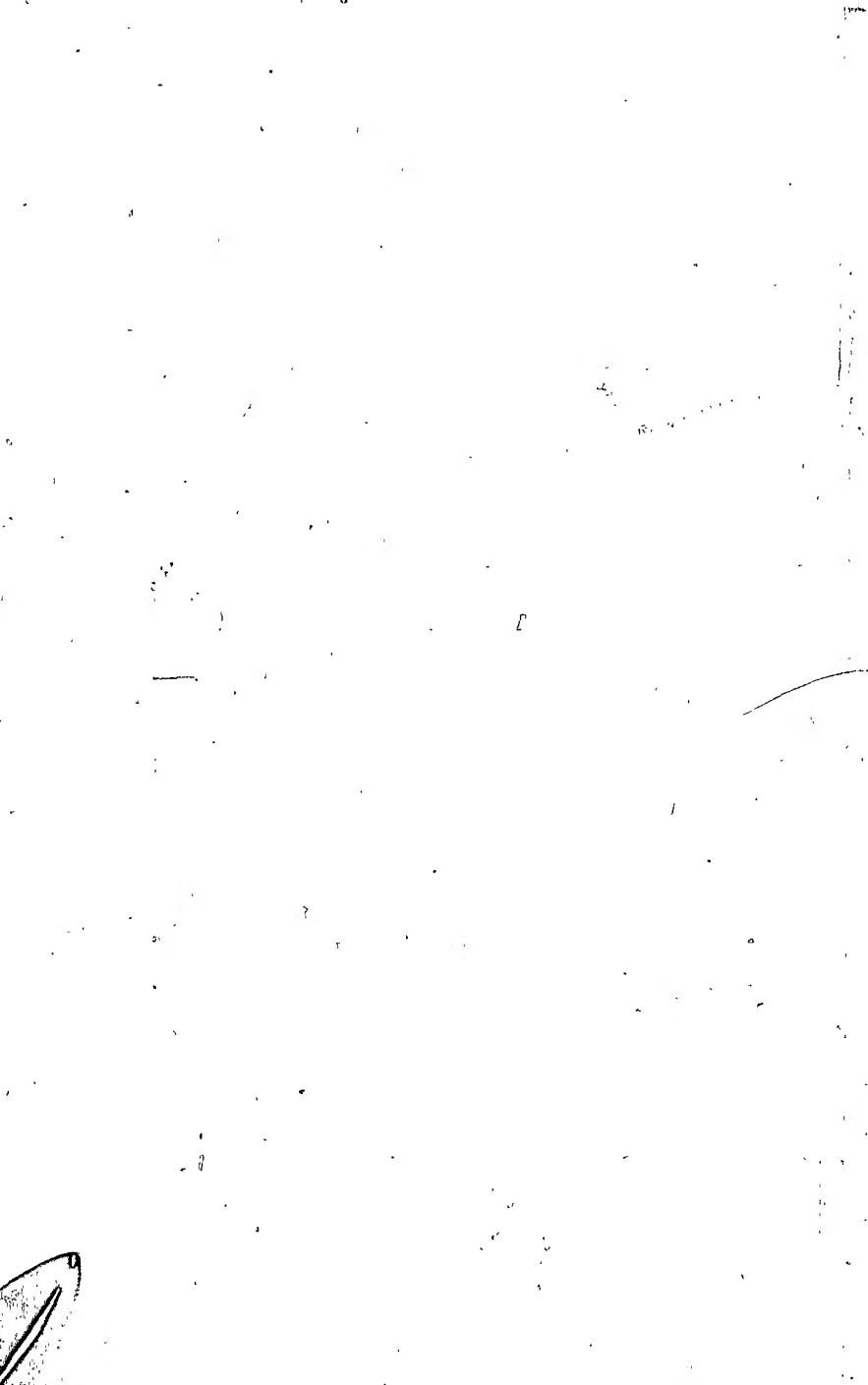
## PREFACE

I HAVE endeavoured to weave into a story some real occurrences which have happened, to my knowledge, in the Great West.

I have built up my individual characters from little touches I saw depicted in several of those with whom I rubbed shoulders, and from incidents I heard concerning them, but not one of the characters herein is the absolute reproduction of any one individual, to my knowledge, and the incidents in connection with the Bar are of course painted to suit the exigencies of the plot.

Those who knew the Last West in former days may perhaps remember some of the incidents recorded herein and point to a paragraph here and there and say "That's true!"

If those who know that wonderful land can say I have faithfully portrayed its ever-changing scenes, then the pleasure I have had in this work, will be redoubled.





## CHAPTER I

THE wind was biting; it seemed to be seeking unguarded moments in the rider's alertness in order to swoop down with a whine and gather him into its chilly embrace; but still the wearied horse plodded through the shifting snow, urged on by the dauntless rider.

There is practically no twilight in Alberta, and at once, it seemed to that lone horseman, sombre daylight had given place to a darkness which he could feel rather than see. Both horse and rider were becoming exhausted, when, abruptly, the bay halted, quivering in every limb. Spur and coaxing proving equally ineffective, with a groan the rider laboriously crawled from the saddle and dropped to the wind-whipped snow. He thoroughly examined his four-footed friend, but found no trace of injury, and, urged on by the fury of the storm, he again climbed painfully to the saddle to continue his journey, but his mount would not move. With an oath he realised that if he were to gain shelter he must proceed on foot, however exacting such a journey might be. Dismounting once more he slipped his arm through the bridle reins and started forward, falling headlong over an obstacle covered by the snow. Slowly he rose, stumbling again over the snowy mound—and then he knew!

With an exclamation he stooped, frantically dug

away the snow and felt the outline of a prostrate human form. A hasty inspection showed him that life still existed but by how slender a thread it was suspended in that inanimate form it was impossible to discover.

With newborn energy he started rubbing their arch-enemy—the snow—on the face and hands of this strange acquaintance. Again and again he rubbed over the heart and used all the knowledge he possessed to bring life back. At last he was rewarded by a groan from his companion. Renewing his efforts, he at last was able to feel that life was once more in evidence in the frost-gripped body. Staggering to his knees, he groped for his horse, and at once realized the awfulness of his position. Thick darkness all around; a spent horse; an almost lifeless companion, and he himself thoroughly exhausted! The outlook seemed hopeless. He knew not how far he was from help and indeed had now lost his sense of direction.

With superhuman effort he at last managed to fling the inanimate form across his saddle and started forward with the staggering beast as guide. The cold swept down in icy blasts and gradually the lagging steps of the walker grew slower and slower; the wind shrieked triumphantly as if scenting two victims instead of one, yet the tottering man moved forward.

His mind, which had been his fountain of life, now gave up the unequal struggle and took to wandering in strange flights. . . . The storm was over and here he was going home with the last load of wheat on the old homestead. Yes, there was the light in the old kitchen and even now he could hear the cowbells as the herd was moving homeward for milking time.

He stumbled and came to with a start. What was that! A light? Oh God! and bells! . . . His mind was wandering again, but he would fight on manfully to the last.

A shout, and his horse stopped. On! On! the thought of stopping meant death. . . The light and bells again and shouts and . . . oblivion.

## CHAPTER II

THE flicker of an eyelid indicated to the watcher at the bedside returning consciousness to the man who lay there. Very shortly he stirred, and at last opened his eyes. The vague stare gradually gave place to a conscious look and recognition shone in his eyes. His tongue licked parched lips, and the watcher held a refreshing draught to the blistered mouth. With a sigh of contentment the man dropped into unconsciousness again, but this time it was sound sleep. The watcher bent tenderly over him, then slipped away from the bedside over to another bed on which lay another form heavily bandaged and apparently inanimate.

The door gently opened and a woman of striking appearance asked a mute question of the watcher by merely raising her eyebrows. Pointing to the bed of the man she had just left, the watcher whispered "Better," and turning to the other bed, murmured "No change."

The enquirer, as quietly, left the room, and made her way to the kitchen where a man sat awaiting her, nervously tapping his fingers on the window ledge. Quiet contentment and capableness seemed to emanate from the woman, and Gerald Gettling realized again as she stood before him that he had made no mistake when he made her his wife.

"Well, Madge," he asked, "Any change?"

"Vance is better," she replied, "but there is no change in the other man."

"I am afraid it is no go with him, poor fellow. He was pretty far gone when we reached them. In fact I don't believe Vance could have made it here if we hadn't gone out to search for the rider of that strange horse which came to the corral that night."

"I wonder how Vance came to find him?" she said thoughtfully. "It seems a miracle that anyone could have picked up a body on a night like that when they weren't looking for him."

"I don't know, but we shall have to get the facts from Vance when he is able to tell us all about it. I reckon he'll be sore for some days yet."

Comfortable Mrs. Gettling started busying herself preparing dinner, and her husband, now the favourable report as to Vance was in and the strain over, filled his pipe and went out to take a look at Vance's horse.

In the sick room the time went slowly for the watcher, and a brief respite when she was relieved by Mrs. Gettling, to enable her to have a hasty dinner, passed all too quickly. Yet somehow that sick-room attracted her. Strangely, her fears regarding Vance's recovery were transferred to the stranger so near death's door. The night when she was expecting a long cosy chat with Vance had brought startling happenings in that quiet household. First of all Gerald rushing in, his work clothes glistening like sparkling raiment with the frost and snow, to tell of the saddled, riderless horse which had arrived at the corral. Then the hastily gathered search party and the non-arrival of Vance all helped to tense her nerves to the highest pitch. Finally, the return of

the search party with two inanimate human forms. How her heart had bounded and seemed to stop when she had recognised one of them as Vance. Could it have been nearly two days since Madge and she, with Gerald's help, had frantically torn off the frozen clothing from the two unconscious men? It seemed as though it had only occurred but a few moments before, it all burned so clearly in her fevered brain. Back she must go to that sick-room and watch by the side of each bed in turn. Vance's robust health had asserted itself, and possibly there would be no ill-effects or setbacks with him, but the stranger—ah! how cruelly he had been treated by the icy foe.

With a smile she saw Madge close the sick-room door, and she sat down again to continue her long vigil.

Late in the afternoon Vance awoke, and made himself very plainly heard. With fingers on lips she tiptoed to him.

"Are you feeling better, dear?" she whispered smiling, and kissing him gently.

"Well, I must have felt pretty rotten if I am," he answered with a forced smile. "How long have I been here, and how did I get here?"

"You mustn't talk yet," she said softly, "it's not good for you, and besides"—(casting a sidelong look, as she spoke, at the other bed)—"we must keep the other patient, the poor fellow you rescued, very quiet."

"Won't you stay and talk to me, then?" he murmured eagerly. "I feel much better since I've heard your dear voice again. Tell me, please, how we came here. All I remember is stumbling over him, and

trying to bring him here, but I lost my bearings, and . . . .”

“And if it hadn’t been for his horse coming to our barn you’d have both lost your lives. Oh, Vance, Vance, what would I have done! I’ve been nearly frantic seeing you lying there not knowing me or anyone. How brave you were to rescue that poor fellow. But now it’s all over, thank God! Now go to sleep again, I must go to the other. Poor fellow, he’s in a bad way I fear; how my heart aches for him. I wonder who he is, and if we shall ever know. He has never stirred since we put him in bed, and he’s badly frost bitten.”

“Is he still unconscious?” Vance asked her.

“Yes,” she said with a sigh, “I wish he would show some signs of life.”

“Well, you’re doing all you can, dear. Sit down and talk to me, quietly, you can’t do more if you go and sit by him.”

“I’d like to, Vance, but I’d like it better if you were up and strong again. Sleep, dear, is what you need right now, and I mustn’t keep you awake.”

The girl looked down pensively at the ring on her left hand, then glanced up and saw Vance’s open eyes. “Go to sleep, old boy,” she murmured, “and remember there are many happy days for us. But I’m nursing both of you, and now you’re better I must concentrate my attention on him. Go to sleep, dear. I must be near him. He may wake any moment now and want me, poor fellow. You go to sleep, I must go to him.”

Vance looked thoughtfully at her, then turned over, his eyes closed, and the girl stole away to the other bed. But Vance was awake, vividly,

passionately awake. Somehow, although she had been very sweet, yet her anxiety over the other fellow grated.

True enough, she seemed tremendously relieved to find that he was so much improved, yet why couldn't she have sat by his bed until he slept again, as he asked her, instead of leaving him to watch that other fellow? Who was he anyway? Had she met him before? Now he was better and able to talk to her she said she was going to concentrate her attention on that other fellow! The thoughts stabbed and drove sleep from him, and he tossed on his bed until exhaustion again overtook him, with the words gnawing at his heart "Poor fellow, I must go to him."



### CHAPTER III

A CHINOOK wind saucily tapped the window panes as if to entice all dwellers within to come out and see the wonderful changes wrought on a snow-clad world. Impatiently it rattled the doors, and tree branches formed swings for the prairie elves.

Vance turned to the watcher o'er the sick stranger (who had now recovered consciousness but was still very ill), and eyed her intently as she fixed her gaze and attention on "the poor fellow" as she called him. Truly she had no ears or time for Vance then, and, although not a jealous man in the ordinary way, he realised that he was playing second fiddle, and it filled him with chagrin.

Slowly, very slowly he backed out of the room, gazing at her all the while, and slowly, very slowly he closed the door and waited, but there was no move from the watcher by the sick bed. He mooched to the kitchen door and stood there in deep thought.

If that were the girl he was engaged to, well, he reckoned he didn't know her very well after all. If that were the girl he had ridden out to see only a few short days ago, well, it certainly didn't look like it. Now, if the stranger had been the man, well, he looked pretty welcome. As for himself, he reckoned he might just as well accept the call of the Chinook and go.

The reverie was interrupted by the entrance of

Mrs. Gettling with eggs in her out-spread apron. "Look," she exclaimed, "five nice eggs. A wonderful find for this time of year when all them fowls do nothing but sit around and hold mothers' meetings. You aren't much better, are-you?" she added, as she noticed Vance's face.

"Yes, yes, Madge, I am fine now, and I'm hitting the trail in a very few minutes."

Mrs. Gettling carefully laid the precious eggs down. "What's got into you? You haven't been up so very long and there's that other fellow you picked up not able yet to tell us anything and—"

"Well, I've got to go," Vance broke in, "and, if you let me have paper and pencil I will leave a note for someone, and take advantage of this welcome Chinook."

"I said you weren't much better, and I meant it," retorted Mrs. Gettling. "You ride out to see a girl, get overtaken by a bad spell and go back without seeing her? You aren't recovered, that's plain—the cold froze your brains and they aren't thawed out yet."

Vance stood silently gazing out of the window, and, with a snort, Mrs. Gettling thumped pencil and paper on the table and went out of the room calling "Gerald!"

With extreme deliberation Vance wrote: it was but a short note yet it took a long time to compose, and he read it again and again before folding it up into a billet-doux. That done, he seemed filled with fresh energy. He grabbed his hat and coat from a nearby hook, and swung out of the house towards the corral.

On the way he encountered Gerald and

Mrs. Gettling, and the sight seemed to fluster him, but he pulled himself together with an evident effort, and took the bull by the horns.

"Have got to go, old chap," he exclaimed to Gerald. "Have used up a lot of valuable time now; may see you again later on."

He held out his hand to the amazed pair, who shook it in silent wonder, and on he went to the stable, where he saddled his horse and rode away.

Mr. and Mrs. Gettling were still standing in the same place as he turned in the saddle just as he passed out of sight, and then his head sank lower as he left the farmhouse further and further behind him.

"I told you his brains were frozen," Mrs. Gettling said, as they turned towards the house.

"What's got into him?" asked Gerald, "has there been any row since I've been out?"

"Not a blessed word to my knowledge, and he never even took a second glance at my nice newlaid eggs, but just said he was going after leaving a note."

"Left a note, did he, where is it?"

"On the kitchen table, I suppose, that's where he was writing."

On entering the kitchen they found the watcher looking thoughtfully out of the window.

"Oh, did you see any sign of a note Vance left behind?" burst out Mrs. Gettling.

"Yes, it was addressed to me," was the lifeless reply.

"What did he say? Can I see it?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Have you had any quarrel?"

"Oh, dear! Don't be so silly! Why we have hardly exchanged a word since he came."

"Did you know he was going away?" put in Gerald.

"I certainly did not, but I suppose everyone can do as they please."

A call from the sickroom sent the colour mounting in the watcher's cheeks and she went at once to her patient.

"Well," said Mrs. Gettling, "I may have misjudged Vance. I said I thought his brains were frozen, but I guess mine must be instead, for I'm blessed if I can understand anything about the whole matter. I expect we'll get straightened out when the stranger gets talking, but it beats me at present. Let's take advantage of the Chinook and get that little job done with the pantry."

Cool and pleasant calmness soon reasserted itself in Mrs. Gettling, and husband and wife were happy in helping one another in the pantry improvement.

In the meantime matters were progressing very speedily in the sickroom. For a man who had been so close to death's door such a short time previously, this man was certainly taking quite a lot of interest in life and the watcher seemed to be carried away by his attentions.

"Whenever you go out of the room," he said, when she had made him comfortable and was once more seated by his side, "I feel worse."

"You surely don't expect me to hover over you like a mother-hen," she laughingly retorted.

"Anyone frozen as badly as I was has to be warmed by the presence of loving care and sympathy—Have you saved my toes and fingers? They are feeling as if I owned them once more."

"I really believe your fingers will be all right, but you will have to get into town to see about your toes as soon as you can. We have done the best we can but they don't look nearly right and you ought to have medical advice as soon as possible now the Chinook's come."

"Chinook, is there? Well, that's a blessed change; I believe, with a little help, I could make the easy chair over yonder."

Very tenderly the girl helped him, and sat down again eager to have all the questions which had been crowding her brain answered, but the stranger was irrepressible.

"How did I get here?" he asked.

"Vance found you and picked you up, and your horse had strayed here, luckily, so a search party had gone out to find its unknown rider—you—and found Vance with his horse and you on its back."

"Who is this man Vance?" he said slowly.

The girl looked at her ring and placing her right hand over it, said quietly, "He is a friend of ours who came on a visit."

"Came! Has he gone then?"

"Yes, about an hour ago."

"Whew! Then I shall have to wait until I go to town to hunt him up and thank him for saving my life."

"You won't find him in town," she said abruptly.

"Oh! Doesn't he live there? Well, no doubt you can tell me his address so that I can get in touch with him; mustn't let that go you know."

"I don't know what his address will be now," she said, getting to her feet, "You see, he simply said he was hitting the trail for Peace River."

She allowed her hand to stray over the arm of the chair and the man caught it playfully.

"You've been awfully kind to me. Who would have thought that my just bringing a horse back to a farmer would have led to such painful experiences and such pleasant surprises in the end?"

The girl did not withdraw her hand—this rough man seemed to thrill her through and through.

"I want to thank you better when I am able to get really around again."

He tried to draw her to him and in the effort the note Vance had written fell on the floor unnoticed. The pantry door slammed, and the girl, blushing furiously, went out of the sickroom.

The man's eyes, now strangely alert, wandered from the door back to his bandaged feet, and then he saw the dropped note. "It may be nothing, or it may be of some value," he thought.

"Miss!" he called, "you dropped a piece of paper!" But the watcher had fled to hide her blushes.

Without a thought of wrongdoing, he painfully reached for the crumpled paper and started to read. Within an instant he grasped the purport of that short message.

"Miss!" he called again, but there was no answer.

"Help!" he roared with the full force of his lungs.

At the sudden outcry both Mr. and Mrs. Gettling and the now frightened watcher rushed into the sickroom.

"Good Lord! Whatever is the matter?" ejaculated Gerald. The stranger waved the crumpled paper excitedly.

"It's all a mistake; I want someone to drive me to a doctor so as I can start for Peace River as soon as possible after Vance."

"So you know Vance pretty well, eh?" interpolated Gerald.

"No, I've never met him to my knowledge in my life, but I must meet him as soon as I can."

Calm Mrs. Gettling collapsed on the nearest bed. "I guess after all," she exclaimed, "it must be my brains that are frozen."

## CHAPTER IV

It was Spring time, and there was much excitement at the Landing. There was an insistent rumour that the Government intended to commence the long-heralded railroad to the far-famed, but hitherto isolated, Peace River Country. Every friendship was being utilised; every argument weighed carefully and used at every opportunity in order to attract attention to the importance of linking up this "Gateway to the North" on the iron road.

The Athabasca River was in high flood. The paddle steamer found it both difficult and easy to make the trip from the Landing upstream; difficult on account of the strong current, and on the other hand, easier of navigation owing to the depth of the water.

Staring somewhat entranced at the rapid river carrying down on its bosom the debris of weakened earth banks and too-curious trees, Vance Colethorpe sat waiting for the return of the steamer.

There was no means of getting across the river; the ferry-chain had snapped with the excessive strain of the flood waters, and a canoe, except in the hands of an expert, would have small chance in that watery turmoil.

Unlike many men who have tasted the bitterness of transferred affection, Vance did not endeavour to drown his sorrow or stupify his brain with the fiery water sold over the bar nearby. His whole outlook



on life had been changed during the past few weeks. Instead of desiring the quietness of a home with the girl of his choice, and the work he took a pleasure in doing, he felt he must get away to the wide open spaces and put as much territory between him and the main characters in that dumb charade which had proved such a heart-gripping drama to him.

Who was this man he had found that night? He had not even seen his face owing to the darkness on that blizzard-swept prairie, and the bandages put on so tenderly by those hands which had caressed his so often. The curse of fickle fate! To think that it was his own act which had proved his own undoing and unhappiness!

This spineless inactivity grated on him and he wandered back to the hotel in the hope of hearing news about the steamer, so that action might soothe the raging of his heart.

He gazed up the one street the settlement boasted, which was just a hill sloping down directly into the water, and was flanked on either side by a motley array of stores and shacks. The Hudson's Bay store held the key position on the hill, and he could see the flag fluttering bravely in the breeze. He was sick to death of all this inertia, and his restless eyes wandered again over the structure which boasted the name of "Hotel," and had the reputation of being the "Farthest North" licensed house.

Its verandah might have been painted during the Klondyke gold rush, which had passed through here, but certainly not since. Its small, barred doors did not invite one's entrance, and he recalled with a sour grimace the sleeping quarters (bearing the dignified name of "Rooms" at the registration desk) which

had but rough lumber partitions extending about six feet up from the rude floor. He remembered his first night as he lay tossing on that hard bed, and wondering if anyone were gazing at him over those partitions! But one can get used to anything, he found, and, with a feeling of increasing boredom, he opened one of the battered doors of the hotel and went in.

As he entered the rotunda, he saw Pierre Nonquist, apparently in complete command of the situation. Everyone there knew Pierre. He had but recently returned from a trip for the Hudson's Bay Company to find his wife dead in their little shack, and two crying children wailing for their mother. The result had been that Pierre was a constant attendant at the bar. He espied Vance immediately, and at once saw in him a new companion.

"You drink with me?" he jerked out.

"No, thanks," Vance replied, somewhat curtly.

The French Canadian's eyes flashed.

"No? Me not good enough for you? You drink with me I say. The drinks are on me!"

Vance caught the hush that came upon the waiting crowd watching the encounter, and immediately he resolved that this poor fellow must be got home. But how without a scene, or the Mounties interfering?

The trapper still stood before him with beady eyes. "You drink with me, see? The drinks are on me I say!"

Vance threw back his head with a laugh and exclaimed, "On you, are they? I like that! On the contrary, my dear fellow, they're on me! Come on," he cried, as he put his arm through Pierre's, "but let us have cigars this time and go for a walk to your

home; I'm dying to see those dear little girls of yours."

The flash in Pierre's eyes died out, and he, child-like, started on a long harangue regarding all his troubles, which was still continuing as Vance led him through the door.

"Give us two of your best cigars," he called.

The bartender looked at him and Pierre in angry astonishment.

"Cigars! Hell! Why not some of this, Pierre?" at the same time shoving the whisky bottle across to him. Vance tightened his hold on the weakening Pierre.

"It's cigars we want, isn't it, Pierre," he said lightly, "You know we have to go and see the little girls."

"Eet is so!" quietly added Pierre, pushing the bottle away.

The cigars were brought with bad grace and thrust forward, and Vance took his carefully, meeting as he did so the angry look of the bartender.

"You don't appear to want customers in here!" he said daringly.

"Not your damned sort!" was the quick response, "get to hell out of here!"

"Thanks! We certainly will," and he led the loquacious Pierre out and up the street.

In the meanwhile the bartender was hurling all the known curses (and evidently he had a large vocabulary) upon Vance's head. He had figured that this half-crazy Pierre would be induced, by a little strategy built up on sympathy, to part with the major portion of the roll he obtained from the Company.

"Get out of here," he roared to a white-headed

drunken form in the corner, and the figure lurched forward—"Give me another drink before I go!" he pleaded.

"No! Get to hell out of it!" he shouted; and the human wreck slunk out.

But a week before he had driven into the Landing with a load of grain. He had made a quick acquaintance with this affable fellow behind the bar and his spare cash had soon gone. Well, what of it? He had a load of grain and how fortunate that that newly found friend would give him spot cash for it! Yet how soon that had gone the same way, and he had not the courage to face them at home without it! Then he had found himself in front of that bar with a half-consumed drink in front of him and no money, with a savage face thrust near his and giving him the option of selling his team for a mere song or of being handed over to the police on a charge of getting goods by false pretences. In his fuddled condition he remembered he had seized the way of escape from this difficulty and had let the team go. Now, with nothing left and no means of getting home, he wandered up the street, and, as the cool air cleared his brain, maudlin sentiment took possession of him.

After petting the children, Vance left the now-happy Pierre, but a child in brain, and slowly retraced his steps to the hotel. To his profound surprise he heard what he never remembered listening to before, and that was a man actually crying. The sound stirred Vance in a strange manner. "Getting over a drunk, I suppose—maudlin drunk. Well, that bartender down at the hotel would make anyone drunk if he could." He reached the sobbing man.

"Say," he said gently, "what's the trouble?"

The man looked up with bleary eyes and then dropped his head again.

"Broke," he whispered, "and I can't get home."

Vance shook him. "Well, it's your own fault," he growled. "You've been drinking all your money away, I suppose."

The other nodded.

"How far away do you live?" Vance asked.

"About 27 miles over there." Jerking a hand lifelessly.

"How did you get here, ride?"

"No, drove a load of grain in for sale."

"Well, where's the grain now?"

"I sold it to the bartender."

"You did what!"

"Sold it to the bartender."

"And spent all the money with him, I suppose?" said Vance sarcastically.

"Yes, and he's got my team as well."

"Got your team as well!"

"Yes, he said I owed for a drink and if I didn't sell him the team he would put the police on me."

An ugly look came over Vance. "How much did he give you for the grain?" he said shortly.

"\$100.00."

"What!"

"Yes, that's true."

"And how much for the team?"

"\$25.00," and the head sunk down again.

Vance shook him—"Here, if you get your team back will you go right home?"

"You bet I will!" said the man, starting to his feet.

"All right, then come with me; keep quiet and do as I say."

They reached the bar-room door.

"You go round to the other side of the hotel and wait for me," said Vance, "and mind, keep quiet and do as I say."

The man slunk away and Vance entered. The bartender's eyes filled with hate.

"Get out of here!" he yelled. "We don't serve any scabs in here."

"Friend," said Vance, firmly, "if you expect people this side of the counter to respect that notice up there about the Bull, you will have to respect it yourself;—bring me a cigar and a drink of your best Scotch, please."

The bartender looked at him and his jaw dropped. "Guess I got the wrong dope on you," he said in a mollified tone. He placed the cigars and the whisky before Vance who slowly picked a smoke and quietly lit it.

"Here," he said, pushing the whisky across to the bartender, "have a drink on me, and don't act up so beastly."

The other jerked a smile out and gulped down the liquor.

"Do you know," asked Vance, "where a fellow could get a good team cheap?"

The bartender's eyes flickered an instant, but the movement had not been unnoticed by Vance.

"You wanting a team?"

"Yes, straightaway."

"Well, I've got a nifty one in the shed at the back I can sell you."

"How much?"

"\$200.00."

"No, no, I don't want to purchase a half-interest in this business; I want to buy a team."

"I said \$150.00."

"No, too much; knock off the hundred and I'll have a look at them."

"Have a drink?" ejaculated the bartender.

"Yes," replied Vance.

The bartender pushed the whisky across.

"Well," said Vance, lifting his glass, "is it a go?"

"How long before you pull out of here?" came the response.

"Not until the steamer comes."

Vance could see the avaricious gleam in the eyes facing him, the quick brain calculating no doubt that there would be ample time to get the team and the money back.

"Good, then it's a go!"

Glasses were set down, and with a call to the other bartender, the pair went out to complete the deal.

Vance looked over the animals carefully. "Well," he said, "they are not cheap, but I suppose it's the best I can do; I'll take them, if the harness is thrown in."

"All right," growled the other, "and would you like a load of grain with them too?"

"No, only the sale price," said Vance, with a sickly smile.

The bartender grabbed the proffered money and said with a leer: "If you want to sell the team back at any time, I'll buy them," then left the shed.

Vance led the animals out to the side of the hotel where he found their late owner, who looked at them sorrowfully.

"Yes, those are them all right. I've had them a long time."

"Where's your waggon?" cut in Vance.

"Right here," said the other.

"Well, hitch up quick then, and hit off for home."

The other looked at him in amazement. "Why I ain't got the money to buy 'em back!" he ejaculated.

"They're bought, I'm telling you. Get a hustle on quick before the seller repents of his bargain."

The horses were quickly hitched and the owner once again stood with the lines in his hand.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said, "but if ever you have a wife who thinks the world of you, as mine does of me, you'll feel something like I do now."

"If ever I do, I shall surely remember you," replied Vance. "And see, here's something to give that good woman of yours, who thinks so much of you. She needn't ever know about your little lapse. Just say it's what you got for the grain. Be good to her, you've got a treasure which no money can buy, and for her sake, if not your own, keep off the booze. Off now! Good-bye!"

"Good Lord!" said the other, as he pocketed the \$100.00 bill, "either I must be still drunk or else you're a fairy godmother, I mean father."

Then his rough hand shot forward and he shook hands emotionally with Vance. "Say, friend, I should like to know your name to remember this by."

Vance laughed and pulled out his card-case. "I little thought I'd be asked for one of these up here," he said smiling and passing a card over. "My name's



too hard to remember, you'd better have one of these."

The other looked at the card in surprise. "I thought you must be 'class,' and whenever I feel like a drop of booze, I'll sure look at this." He tucked the card carefully in his pocket then climbed into the wagon and drove off, waving his whip to Vance.

The mail stage had just driven up to the hotel entrance as Vance came round the corner and joined the group of idlers watching the passengers alight. A tall, rangy-looking individual climbed down, swearing lustily, and after the baggage was deposited the stage drove away. The idlers soon dispersed, leaving the newcomer and Vance the only occupants of the verandah.

"Beastly rotten country, ain't it!" was the first break in the silence.

"Ain't bad," was the response.

"Blasted flies nearly eat a man up in warm weather, and the cold hugs you almost to death in the winter! It damn near got me last time."

Vance started—"I hear the flies *are* bad at the Halfway House."

"You bet they are. And to think that only a little while back, it seems but last week, I was nearly frozen to death. Damn this country!"

"If you don't like the country why do you stay in it! Why do you come even further west?"

"Well, I've got to find a fellow first and tell him what a damned fool he is."

"You seem to be going to a lot of trouble just to do that,—couldn't you write him?"

"I don't know where he is exactly."

"Well, couldn't you send a message to him? Surely you could find someone going in the neighbourhood of where he is?"

"I don't know his full name and—"

"What!" ejaculated Vance, "You've come up here to find a fellow you don't know where and whose name you don't know—say that stuff doesn't go here, let me tell you!" So saying he swung through the entrance and went into the bar.

"Give me a cigar," he said smilingly, and turned on his heel.

"Aren't you going to drink?" called the bartender.

"Not this time," he replied, and looking up at the motto overhead, he added, "I'm thinking of sending a chap in to learn that advice about the Bull."

## CHAPTER V

"THERE'S a tarnation racket on this blinking boat, what it's all about beats me, and I wish I'd never started on this blasted trip." The rangy-looking fellow knocked his pipe against the bulwark.

"There's an election up-stream to-day," replied Vance, "and the Mounties are searching for liquor before we put off. But that's not on account of the election, they always do that, I hear."

"What for? Can't a man even have a solace up here in this God-forsaken country?"

"No, the river marks the prohibition line. If you want booze you've got to stay south of it."

They automatically raised their hands as the police came near and, after a casual search, the Mounties went on shore and the gang plank was hauled on deck.

The two men, somehow drawn to each other through their previous acquaintance at the hotel, stood together, watching the treed banks slowly slipping by. The swollen water made no noise and from the jack-pine on the banks came the call of countless birds.

A shot rang out from the shore and the newcomer ducked. "Seems we've struck an interesting part of the country, what with swollen rivers and bullets. . . ."

"That wasn't a bullet," explained Vance. "They

tell me they fire blank shot to signal the steamer to put in there."

Several times this happened, and the boat, not very commodious at any time, was crammed with a motley throng of menfolk, all going up river to vote.

Vance walked to the boat's side and stood gazing long and silently at the rush of swollen water streaming by, carrying on its bosom uprooted trees and other debris. He saw beyond it all a true picture of the rush of the present-day world, with its ever-changing views, its ups and downs, carrying on its bosom the flotsam and jetsam of humanity. Was he fast dropping into this jettisoned class? Well, what matter? Who would care!

The chug-chug from the engine brought him back with a jerk. What a lesson this inanimate thing was teaching him! All at once he felt proud of that little steamer, proud to be privileged to ride in her and watch her bravely fighting her way against the opposition of powerful current and floating debris. He turned towards the deck again, filled with fresh determination to fight against the current of recent occurrences and to win in spite of all obstacles.

Towards mid-day the steamer dropped anchor and everyone trooped ashore, where a couple of shacks showed signs of human habitation.

A curious sight greeted the eye. Outside one of the shacks sat a huge barrel, apparently containing something very appetizing to the numerous men who gathered round. A heavy, bloated fellow, evidently in charge of affairs, was holding forth as the freshly arrived party came up.

"And remember, everyone that votes right, that is

for 'Oskiss, gets a drink on coming out—now line up everyone of yer and record yer votes!”

“What’s all this about?” asked the stranger of Vance.

“It’s a voting booth, at least that’s what it is officially known as, I reckon, though the secrecy of the ballot or challenges for voting qualifications don’t seem to be known round here.”

“Here you two blokes, get into line there, and mind you vote for Mr. 'Oskiss or yer don’t get a drink.”

“We have no vote,” retorted Vance. “Why, we’re only just going up-country and off the steamer.”

“Waal, that’s just like all the rest; no one will question yer qualifications too closely, I reckon, to-day. Line up.”

“I won’t, that’s flat! exclaimed Vance.

“This is a bit thick, isn’t it?” whispered his companion.

The bloated-looking official whispered to two other men close by, and they came to where Vance and the stranger stood.

“Say, what’s the big idea here, anyway?” said one. “Think you boys are going to get away without voting? Not much! Get in line there or we’ll put you through it.”

Vance whispered to the other, who nodded, and they quietly moved up to the end of the line.

The tedious moments at last passed and they entered the voting booth.

“Who are the candidates?” Vance asked.

“What’s that?” ejaculated the individual who had taken their names.

"Who're running in this election, I asked?" said Vance.

The individual dropped his pencil, took a gulp out of a tin cup nearby and replied, "Hoskiss and Patton, but what the hell's that go to do with you?"

"Well, as I've got to vote, you can put me down for Patton," Vance said deliberately.

"And me too," put in the stranger.

"Hell's Bells!" exclaimed the recording angel and dived for the cup again.

"Here, George!" he yelled.

George, the bloated-faced individual, poked his head through the window.

"What in the hell's up now?" he asked politely.

"These two blokes want to vote for Patton!" the other spluttered.

"Well, they don't get no likker then!" snapped George, as he backed out.

Voting being over, those who were going up-country continued their way, and the rest sat around to finish the party.

The portage of eleven miles did not seem long, and soon Vance and the others were going on board the steamer waiting at the end of Lesser Slave Lake.

"Looks like a dirty night!" a deck hand said, "but don't suppose that will stop the Cap. anyway."

"You two blokes will have to share one cabin," said the combined steward-purser and all-round man.

"Alright," growled the stranger (whom Vance had now nicknamed "Irish," owing to his being "dead set agin everything," it seemed), "let's turn in and try and forget our troubles."

They made their way round the narrow run-walk which skirted the outside of the covered main deck,

where horses were tied, baggage and goods of all sorts piled; past muttering men and other indistinct forms in the gathering darkness, through part of the engine-room and the kitchen-parlour, into a cupboard-like arrangement designated as "Cabin No. 3." It was too early to go to bed, so they sat and smoked, listening to the various noises which told them the boat had left her moorings and was getting under way. Gradually the noises ceased as those on board settled down for the night, while the boat found the open water which was ominously calm.

Suddenly the storm burst with full fury, lashing the shallow lake into foamy billows. The two men crouched in the narrow cabin, with the rain pouring through the roof, and the water soon lapping over their boots on the floor.

"Damned pleasant country, ain't it?" growled Irish.

"It is," sweetly replied Vance. "I thought the view coming up the river to-day was grand."

"And I suppose you think this is grand, too, don't you?"

"No, I've seen better nights, I must say."

"I wish the hell I'd never seen the country!"

"Well, why don't you go out of it then! What's the good of growling all the time! No one asked you to come, did they? Is anyone keeping you? Get out, I say."

"I can't; a fellow was awfully decent to me back east, and I've got to find him to tell him what a damned fool he is and to go back."

"Oh, stow that stuff! Here take which bunk you want and turn in."

With a growl, Irish climbed up into the upper

berth, and after discarding his boots, which he flung with more adjectives at the foot of the bunk, he wrapped himself up in a blanket and dropped back in silence. Vance lay down in the lower bunk and tried to sleep, but the swish of the water on the floor and the constant dripping of the rain through the cabin roof, the pitching of the steamer and the thought of the dirty weather she was facing, all served to drive sleep from him, and after a long siege of wakefulness, he quietly slipped out of the cabin and made his way through to the lower deck. Here he found horses tied up in stalls, a few sleepy men and one halfbreed girl shivering in her soaking garments. The sight of her at once brought into play all his chivalrous compassion, and he cudgelled his brains to find a way to help her in her plight, but realised that up here, in this rude country, his best intentions might easily be misunderstood.

Why not offer her his bunk, she could at least be warm there—but what about Irish? It would never do to place him in such a situation—Well, he must see if Irish were sleeping, and, if not, perhaps he would agree to give up their not-altogether-pleasant cabin to this shivering girl. Back he wended his way and found Irish leaning over the edge of his bunk, swearing furiously at him, or rather at the place where he should have been.

Vance explained the situation and, to his amazement, his companion immediately acquiesced.

"She's welcome to the whole blooming place, as far as I'm concerned," he said, "and if she can sleep, well, it's more than a white man can!"

The two returned to the girl, and after explaining the position with considerable difficulty and con-



vincing her that she was perfectly safe in accepting their offer, they watched her go to the cabin and then settled themselves down by the restless horses. Time dragged slowly and conversation lagged. The storm seemed to increase in violence, and the electric lights, so famous in that north country, went out at varying intervals. Then a shout and a crash, total darkness and the boat stopped.

Vance sprang to his feet. "Looks like a bad mess!" he yelled. "Wonder where we are and if we can get out of this. I'm going after that half-breed girl."

Irish groped around to find his bearings amid the shouts of the crew and the excited passengers and the howling of the storm. He found that the steamer had been driven ashore, and the ordinarily passive lake was now a cauldron of boiling water dashing against the sides of the boat.

How badly damaged she was, it was impossible to discover until daylight came, and in the meantime anxiety filled all hearts as to whether she would hold together.

The moments passed and the steamer commenced to list. The horses strained at their ropes and one broke loose, adding to the pandemonium. The boat listed more, and men rushed hither and thither loosing the now frantic animals and forcing them into the swirling water with the idea of their swimming to land.

The moments passed and Vance had not returned. Irish helped loose the last horse, and a fellow traveller roared something in his ear about getting ashore, but he felt he must go in search of his cabin companion. Slowly he made his way down the

sloping deck and reached the cabin, but the door refused to open. With a bounding heart he put his whole strength against it and it yielded. The darkness was intense and the water was rapidly rising. He called but there was no answer. He groped about and found the lower bunk and the girl lying thereon, whether asleep or unconscious he could not tell. He lurched forward and took her in his arms; struggling with his burden he groped his way laboriously back on deck and found it empty! Laying the still inanimate form on the deck, he hurried to the side and saw a dancing light which he figured came from the shore. To attempt to reach it was madness knowing neither the distance nor the depth of the water. He was frantic. Then he again remembered his cabin companion—where was he? He had gone to fetch the girl now lying on the deck, but what had happened to him? His brain was whirling as he tried to recollect any sign of the man, and then he remembered that the cabin door had seemed locked, or was it weighted by an obstacle and a human one at that? "I must get him," he murmured.

He buffeted his way to the cabin again—the door was swinging to and fro with the rushing water now.

He stooped down and groped for the thing he felt was there, and at last his hand touched a cold wet face. His head seemed bursting but he put forth all his fast-failing strength and dragged the man up to where the girl lay and then fell headlong.

## CHAPTER VI

THE dawn broke upon a sodden scene; but soon the rising sun hid all the blemishes and brought out in striking contrast the beauty of the fleecy sky, the now tranquil water and the tree-lined banks.

Round the fire embers on the shore sprawled various types of manhood, and as the sun's rays called each of them, they had their own vivid personal touch to announce that they were once more alive and alert to the day's happenings.

A happy-go-lucky bunch they were. The night before, fleeing from a storm-beaten steamer, and now on the morrow regaling themselves, whilst cogitating on the shore, with the plug which serves the double purpose of satisfying hunger and craving for tobacco.

The gallant old steamer was deep down by the nose in the sands, but the Captain did not seem over-concerned.

"Water got in her a bit," he said thoughtfully, "but I've seen her worse." A fellow on-looker had the nerve to question such a possibility, and at once the whole artillery of the Captain's verbal brigade broke loose upon him. Undoubtedly the atmosphere was getting hotter! The interjector evidently hadn't quite grasped the capabilities of the Captain, for he was busy pointing out the difference between an ice-jam and the present position of the boat, when his explanation was cut short by a knock-out punch under the jaw from that irate officer.

"What I says goes up here, I'll have you know," he thundered, "and now everyone of you lazy blighters climb aboard and get the pumps going quick!"

The one who had dared to question the Captain's words rose unsteadily to his feet and soon joined the others who were carrying out the Captain's orders.

The Captain was very busy thoroughly examining all the various parts of the boat as far as the water would let him, and on the finish of his examination he called for the engineer and discussed matters with that worthy.

"She ain't hurt at all, I reckon," he ejaculated. "I calculate as soon as we gets the water out of her and back her out of this damned sand which has caught her nose, she'll be alright, so when the water 'lows you, get those engines working, see."

With that he strolled away and around to inspect the horse quarters, and then he caught sight of the half-breed girl and the two men. The girl sat up as he approached.

"Here, you black-skinned wash-out, get busy there, and get some breakfast ready for all hands; the cook's busy pumping."

The girl struggled to her knees.

"Kick your partners up too!" he yelled, "there's work for everyone."

The girl shook her head. "Them both sick," she said weakly, "near drowned."

The Captain snorted contemptuously.

"Fine tale that," he growled, coming up to where the men lay. "Nearly drowned in that bit of a flurry; Hell!"

"Here," he yelled, kicking Vance, "Get up and get busy!"

Vance opened his eyes with an effort and looked up at the man leering down at him and at the frightened face of the girl nearby and gradually sat up.

"Get up!" yelled the Captain again, "and lend a hand round here quick—wake you, you son of a b——."

Vance was on his feet at once, tingling in every limb, and facing the Captain, caught him as the last fighting word came.

"Brother! you mean I reckon, 'son of a brother.' I didn't see you smile and you aren't showing any hardware for action, so I guess you slipped that time, eh?"

The other's face grew livid.

"No, I ain't hipped and I made no mistake. You get busy right now or I'll make a mess of you on this here deck, and your black-skinned skirt there, too, I've already told off to get some grub ready."

Vance put his full force behind the blow that landed on the Captain's jaw and he went down in a lump. With heaving breast Vance bent over him.

"That's not on my account but on account of this girl here whom you've slandered with your dirty tongue."

The Captain crawled to his feet. "Alright my fine buck, you and I will settle this some other time. Just look out, and mind, if there ain't no grub ready in half-an-hour, there'll be something doing and more than I will have a say in it too."

Vance turned to the girl, but she was on her knees beside Irish.

"He's no here yet," she said, shaking her head sadly.

Vance knelt down by the prostrate man and commenced artificial respiration, listening to the childish thanks bubbling out of the girl.

"You and him both good men," she said. "He come and get me when water come in room down below."

Vance started. This man did that, did he! Well, what did he himself do?

"Wasn't it I?" he asked, looking up.

The girl shook her head.

"It was him," she said, and her eyes glistened as she spoke, "and then he went for you. I just hear him say: 'I must get him,' when he left me and I went to sleep again. Oh! Brave man wake!"

Vance looked afresh at the prostrate form.

"Gad!" he thought, "and he risked his life to save her and me!" Then he continued rubbing, and, after a while, was rewarded by the sight of Irish stirring.

The big, blue eyes opened and stared up at the two faces bending over him.

Silence for a while; then he spoke.

"Seem to have two attentive friends," he murmured.

The girl clasped her hands and her eyes were telling a story for the man on the deck.

"Ver' brave man and good," she uttered.

"Thanks, old chap," said Vance, clasping the other's hand, "I shan't forget!"

Irish sat up.

"What's all this about anyway?" he asked.

The girl, full of the whole story and her thanks,

burst in before Vance could reply, and he could only stand by and listen to her lauding the other.

Irish looked at her queerly.

"Miss," he said slowly, "that's the first genuine thanks I've ever had, and it shows you've got a damned white heart anyway. I reckon if you're going up country you and me'll become better acquainted."

The girl clasped and unclasped her hands excitedly and her eyes danced with pleasure.

"Good, good, ver' good!" she exclaimed.

Vance broke in, "I don't want to upset any of your plans, but if breakfast or whatever meal they call it, is not ready right soon, there's trouble brewing."

"And I'm cook," put in the girl, laughingly.

"Well, let's get busy," said Irish, and led the way to the kitchen quarters.

The smell of cooking soon permeated the steamer, and the Captain grinned sardonically.

"Thought I'd tame 'em," he muttered, "but, by heck, that big buck's going to get a bit of lead if he don't loosen up with more work and lay off trying to boss me."

The clanging of the bell brought many hungry men around the table, and with the devouring of food their good humour returned too, with the exception of the Captain.

He was watching Vance and the girl and Irish, the latter two serving up the meal. Vance took his place with the others who were eating and this angered the Captain all the more.

After breakfast Vance waited on the other two, and all three then strolled around on deck.

A roar came from within the vessel, and the

Captain appeared with the girl's wet skirt held up to view.

"What's this doing in your cabin?" he challenged Vance. "You dirty dog, and trying to pull the goody-goody stuff on me!"

The rest surged round him.

"Shut up!" cried Vance. "When you are in a fit state I'll explain."

"You explain right now, you son—"

He got no further. Irish's fist crashed into his face and the outburst ended with a snarl. There was a flash and a report and Irish sank on deck. The girl screamed and ran to where he lay and took his head in her lap.

The Captain seemed sobered by what he had done, and everyone looked awestruck.

Vance walked up to the Captain who still held the revolver in his hand.

"Better give me that; it isn't safe in the hands of a man with a temper like yours."

The gun was quietly handed over.

Then Vance said slowly and decisively, so as to allow the full purport of his remarks to penetrate the understanding of all present, "Captain, if that man dies you'll swing; if he's badly hurt you'll answer for it! He must be attended to right away and don't let us have any further dirty remarks from you or anyone else regarding the young woman."

At that moment came a "chug" from the engine—a jerk and an upward tilt of the boat, and the much-battered steamer slowly backed out from the shore, ready for her journey again up-lake.

Vance went at once to Irish and knelt, tenderly examining the wound. He found a bullet had gone



through part of the chest but he could not tell if it had touched any vital organ.

As his fingers moved over the barely-breathing man they jerked out a wallet from the breast pocket and it fell open on the prostrate form. A folded piece of paper slid out and Vance was carefully replacing it in the wallet when his eye caught sight of his own handwriting.

With an exclamation he spread the paper open and saw it was the note he had written to the Watcher in the sickroom at the farmhouse.

What was this man doing with it?

Irish stirred and Vance put the wallet back in its owner's pocket and slipped the note into his own, but the girl had seen and her flashing eyes told of her loyalty to the prostrate man and of her intention to tell him all!

## CHAPTER VII

THE steamer, hooting her arrival, docked at last at the wharf at Grouard, and the passengers quickly scrambled ashore, all except Vance and Irish and the breed girl who was attending solicitously to the injured man.

By arrangement, Vance went ashore to procure a conveyance of some description on which to transport Irish, and came face to face with the local Sergeant of the R.N.W.M.P.

Vance hesitated a moment and then pulled out the revolver he had taken from the Captain and handed it over to the mountie.

"Better take care of this, Sergeant," he said, smiling. "It isn't a safe toy in the hands of a quick-tempered fool."

"What's this I hear about someone being shot-up on the trip up?" enquired the Sergeant, taking the gun.

"The Captain went roaring mad, I reckon, for he just up and pumped my friend one, and I'm just looking for a conveyance to get him somewhere where he can rest and recover."

"That's easy; anyone around here will lend you their rig. Here, wait a minute, I'll get one."

Turning on his heel he strode over to Revillion's store nearby and accosted a bearded individual sitting in a weary-looking conveyance. The driver nodded in response to the Sergeant's conversation, then

bending his head down and looking sideways at Vance, whispered to the Sergeant.

The officer started and had a further animated conversation with the bearded individual, and then the conveyance was driven in the direction of the wharf.

With the Sergeant's help Vance carried the injured man off the boat and placed him in the back of the rig, and the breed girl immediately jumped in and showed she was going to see him safely to his destination.

"Look a loving pair, don't they?" grunted the bearded man.

"I suppose anyone who shows the slightest signs of ordinary decent behaviour to another of the opposite sex is reckoned in love up in these parts," retorted Vance.

During this sally the Sergeant had been holding converse with the Captain and then he came over to where Vance stood by the buggy.

"Who did you say shot this man?" he asked.

"The man to whom you have just been speaking—calls himself the Captain of that shipping delight," said Vance facing him.

"Well, I've asked him and he says it was a quarrel between the two of you, and you had the gun, you remember."

"Yes, I took it off him for safety's sake," retorted Vance.

"Himm" mused the Sergeant. Then turning round to the Captain, he yelled "Don't pull out without reporting to me," and back to Vance he said in a voice of authority, "Until I thrash this matter out I consider it my duty to place you under arrest for the

unlawful wounding of this man, so you'll have to come to the barracks with me."

Vance was fully taken by surprise, and the girl in the buggy burst out with an "Oh!"

"Oh, shut up, Aggie!" jerked out the Sergeant. "You very kindly got up in that rig, so you can come along, too, until this whole business is sifted out. The Captain told me all about your making up with these fellows. That game's not in my jurisdiction if they are such magpies as to fall for your line, but this shooting affair is my business. Now for barracks everyone of you."

Vance walked beside the Sergeant in silence till they came to the latter's horse. The Sergeant looked at him.

"Care to walk beside me proper or must I get another rig?" he demanded.

"I'll walk with you," said Vance shortly.

They reached the barracks, the silence being still unbroken. The Sergeant called for someone to take his horse and to help the wounded man out of the rig, then led the way into his office.

"Sit down," he said to Vance. Vance complied.

"Let's have your version of this affair," the Sergeant said, passing over a Bible to Vance, "and, mind, you are on your oath."

"This is a queer way to handle justice," Vance said quietly, looking steadily at him.

"Well, it's the way we do it up here, and it is a good way too, so spout."

Vance told the details of the voyage in his quiet manner, and the Sergeant took it down in writing. After asking some questions he looked at Vance steadily.

"What are you doing up here?" he asked slowly.

"Nothing."

"What are you intending to do?"

"Nothing."

"That isn't sense, or any reply; let's have it straight."

"Really that is the truth. I came up just to get a grip on myself again after being badly shaken up, and then—"

"Yes, and then what?"

"I don't know."

"Hmm! Well, you'll have to stay around here for a bit until I get this other business straightened out and then maybe you'll tell what you are going to do. In the meantime you can go into the yard and amuse yourself until mealtime."

Vance slowly got up—"Well," he said, forcing a smile, "I heard a lot about the Peace River Country and wanted to see it, and it seems I'm having a Cook's tour in getting there. Perhaps my companion's opinion of the country isn't far wrong after all."

With that he swung out into the yard.

The Sergeant sat drumming his fingers on the desk.

"Strange, very strange. Seems frank enough, but yet the Captain's story fitted in with the yarn I heard from bearded Joe. Hmm."

He took the revolver out of his pocket and carefully emptied the chambers and examined the five unexploded cartridges and cases. Then he pulled out his "companion and adviser" and sat smoking for a while, thinking deeply.

Suddenly he jumped to his feet—"I have it!" he

exclaimed, and went out into the yard and over to where Vance was lying sprawling.

"Get up!" he ordered, "and give me the rest of the cartridges you have."

"Me? I haven't any. I don't pack a gun around with me—No, my best defence is Nature's own weapons—these," and Vance held up two resolute-looking fists.

"Hold your hands up while I search you," said the Sergeant brusquely.

"Sure, go to it!"

The mountie satisfied himself there was no ammunition on Vance then walked across the yard, saddled his horse and rode off down the trail towards the wharf.

Arriving there, he flung the reins over the horse's head and went on board the steamer. The Captain was busy making repairs caused by the storm. "Hullo! Serg." he sang out. "Hullo! Cap." came the response as the Sergeant sat down nearby.

They talked of the storm and other minor things for a while, then the mountie said pensively:

"Anything for the barracks on board?"

"Nope."

"Dash it! I want some ammunition!"

"Can spare you a little; have no use for it; will get it for you."

"Thanks."

The Captain disappeared and shortly after returned with a little sack.

"Here's some, Serg. Yer welcome, I've no use for it."

The Sergeant looked at a cartridge carefully.

"No, I don't suppose you have, Cap. You see—I have your gun."

The Captain jumped up. "So that's the game, is it, Serg! Well, you're a damned fine friend, you are!"

"Suppose you tell me, without any unnecessary adjectives, your little story; I've got the other's," quietly replied the Sergeant.

The Captain's face went livid.

"You don't get a damned bit of information out of me. I'm boss of this boat and what I says goes, do yer see, and if they don't obey me they've got to take their medicine."

"The medicine seems to be pretty potent," retorted the Sergeant. "Well, you can't pull guns indiscriminately even up here, so you'd better come with me up to the barracks, Cap. and postpone these repairs."

The force of law was known far and wide in those parts, and all who fell foul of the toils came to regard it as wisdom to submit quietly, for they knew the mounties would get them eventually.

The Captain jerked on his coat and followed the Sergeant on to the wharf, and up to where the horse stood.

"Going to walk quietly with me, Cap., or shall I get a rig?"

"I'll walk quietly, damned quietly. There won't be no lipping with you from now on."

They trudged on together and eventually reached the barracks. Here the Sergeant led the way into the yard where Vance still was, and walked up to him.

"You're cleared," he said shortly. "Will you

take my horse over to the stable and see he gets fed? . . . . Thanks."

Vance looked amusedly at him, and, sliding his arm through the bridle, walked over to the stable.

The Sergeant guided the Captain over to his office and sat him down in the chair recently vacated by Vance.

"You can tell me the whole truth, or else I'll get it from other parties," he said sternly.

The Captain sat livid, and stonily silent. The minutes passed.

"All right, Cap., just as you wish. You can spend a little time in our cooler until we see how the injured man gets on."

The Sergeant walked to the door and called. Two constables appeared.

"Take this man and lock him up in No. 2," the Sergeant said, shortly.

The Captain burst into a torrent of abuse.

"Yer can't do it, I tell yer, there ain't a man living what can man-handle me and get away with it!"

"Here's one right here," said the Sergeant quietly, and going up to the enraged man he gave him the mountie grip and pushed him struggling out of the room and into the cell.

Coming back he wiped his hands—"All right, boys," he said, "I'll go and look at the fellow he shot up!"

Going through the barracks he came to a room where he found the wounded man lying on a bed and the half-breed girl beside him holding his hand.

"Get out of here," he ordered her.

"Please, sir, he's my man," she said timidly.



"He's your what?"

"My man!"

"Your husband, you mean?"

The girl hung her head; her English did not extend to the expression "lover."

"Hmm! Well, that's his business when he's well. I can't stop that, but this is my business whilst he's sick—Savvy?"

The girl nodded.

The Sergeant thought for a while.

"Where did you pick him up?"

"On boat."

"Ever seen him before?"

The girl shook her head.

"Your man, eh?" The Sergeant smiled.

The girl's eyes flashed and with heaving bosom, she burst forth: "Yes, my man; him good to me, him save my life on boat! I nurse him now!"

"Well, you can do that alright," laughed the Sergeant, "and see you get him well quick."

"Yes, sir, queek."

"Where you going?"

"Home, other side Peace River."

"Good, and when he's better, you go, see?"

"When I go he go too; he want to come better 'quainted with me, he said so."

The Sergeant looked at her for a moment and as he left the room he called:

"You get him well quick, mind!" and the girl, reseating herself beside the sick man, looked at him with a smile which lighted up her features and whispered, "Yes, sir, queek!"

## CHAPTER VIII

THE days passed slowly; in fact, they seemed almost unending to Vance in that sleepy northern settlement, where the arrival of the steamer once a week was the only event to break the monotony of an objectless existence to the inhabitants.

The spell of the place seemed to be gradually gripping him, and he felt rebellious against his enforced idleness, for, although no longer under restraint and able to roam the country around, yet he was tied there until Irish was pronounced out of danger, and he would no longer be needed as a material witness to the assault by the Captain of the steamer, who was still in a bellicose mood in his cell.

At times Vance felt the call of the open places and yearned to see the Peace River Country and the much-talked-of Grande Prairie; at other times his very self rebelled against going further west, and a tug at the heart reminded him that his affections were still centred on someone else, however changed hers might be.

At last there came the welcome news from the Police Doctor (who was Dentist and Eye-specialist in those parts as well) that, provided he took good care of himself for some little time to come, Irish would pull through.

Vance accordingly made his preparations for continuing his journey up-country, and, having made arrangements regarding transportation, he was faced

with the task of saying good-bye to all hands, including "Irish," for whom, through their experiences, he had conceived a warm friendship.

The Sergeant, too, after the satisfactory ending (so far as Vance was concerned) of the shooting episode, had been most companionable, and Vance realized the respect he had for the man who put Duty always before Self.

The Doctor had been a good antidote for jaded nerves, and again and again the old rafters of the Long Room had rung with the outbursts of merriment caused by the jovial remarks of the curer of all ills.

Then there was the pale face of poor "Irish" making another picture in his memory. How he would remember that sickroom scene, with the breed girl looking at him with a mixture of friendliness and antagonism, and the daily reports which varied so little from "No change" for days on end, until it seemed as if the stout heart fighting the stern battle would have to submit and the Grim Reaper gather in another harvest.

Yes, he would find that, although his waiting around around had been irksome, the parting from these strangely-made friends would be equally distasteful.

As the day for his departure drew near, Vance felt an almost guilty feeling in leaving Irish behind; but he reassured himself with the thought that he was being well looked after, and indeed no one could have been more solicitous than the breed girl.

The team would be due in a little while now, and he must sever these cords of friendship, the strength of which only those who have felt the genuineness

and sincerity which underlie true friendship in the outer West can understand.

He found the Sergeant busy with the abominations of the Service—Official Reports—and consequently not in a very talkative mood.

"So you are moving on; well, have you decided what to tell me regarding your intentions and object in going up-country?"

Vance laughed, for he could see the twinkle this time in the Sergeant's eye.

"Well, Sergeant," he said, "you may not believe it but I'm being driven West to the open places I've heard so much about, by something which happened way back East and—"

The Sergeant, all alert now, gripped his desk.

"Say, are you running away from something?"

Vance's jaw dropped as he faced the now-officious Sergeant. He had not thought of his actions in that light—was it true? Was he running away like a coward? He forced a smile.

"How you always think of your job, don't you, Sergeant? Well, I don't know whether I'm running away or not; fact is I'm trying to find my real self and see where I stand."

"Hmm! Well, I don't know what to make of it, but though I don't mean you any harm, remember, if you are running from something you should not have done, you can't get away with it even up here—Good-bye."

Vance, still smiling, shook the Sergeant's hand.

"I'll remember your words," he said slowly, and went out.

As he went over to find the doctor, the Sergeant's words echoed through his brain. "If you are

running away from something you should not have done, you can't get away with it even up here!"

Well, he hadn't done anything he shouldn't have done; it was she; and wasn't he doing the square thing in getting away and trying to forget? How impossible it seemed though! The gnawing at his heart was still unstilled, and so he must go on and on until he had found himself again and could pick up the threads of the old life afresh.

The Doctor was in a jovial mood—Irish was improving rapidly and was even now proving a hard patient to handle.

"Fine boy," he chuckled, as Vance enquired after the invalid. "Wants to get up now his temperature has come back to earth again. He's had a bad time of it, and not so long ago he must have been badly frostbitten too, most of his toes are off, and his hands show signs of it since they've grown so lily-white and clean; but he's a tough specimen and old Death's gone off growling again."

"Fine, Doc., fine; well, I've got to go and say 'Good-bye' to him, so I guess I'll say the same to you now! I'm going in a few minutes."

The Doctor looked what his tongue uttered.

"I'm sorry you are leaving us. We don't get many 'White' white men up here, you know. They generally come up here to fight the booze, or they can't go back for some reason. Well, if you are going, take some of these pills with you; they're mighty handy when there is sickness about; commonly known as "Sweat Tablets," guaranteed to cure colds, fevers and —"

"And anything which ails one, Doc., eh! Thanks, I'll take them. Good-bye."

And now for Irish. The other two had not been so bad, but Irish was different somehow. Oh, well, the majority of travellers on this old Life's Highway were but as Longfellow says, "Ships that pass," and who knew but that he might signal him again on another course.

Irish was certainly better. His old self had made its presence felt and yet the old hatred of the country seemed to be lacking. Vance wondered if the girl at the bedside had anything to do with the change.

"Well, I'm glad to see you are so much better, old chap," said Vance cordially; "I'm leaving in a few minutes for Peace River Crossing. There was something I was going to ask you but I can't remember it now. Hope you'll soon be well and on your feet again."

"Very glad we met," said Irish. "We certainly have packed quite a lot of experience into a short time. I expect to be coming up your way as soon as I can make the journey, and possibly we shall see each other again. I hope the Sergeant can tell me how many fellows have passed through here for up-country during these last few months; I've got to find that chap, you know——"

"Oh, yes, I know," put in Vance, laughing; "Well, I hope you find him. Good-bye."

## CHAPTER IX

THE team was waiting as he left the Barracks, with the Doctor cracking a parting joke at his side, and swinging up on the seat beside the driver, they started off on their long trip.

The scenery, the distance, and the flies proved subjects for conversation for some miles, then both lapsed into silence. The strange happenings of the past few weeks were uppermost in Vance's mind, and he, for once, had ceased to dwell on the picture down East of the sickroom and the Watcher, her averted looks and the transferred attentions to the other invalid.

The call of the West was sounding in his ears; he felt the freedom of it all, and the feeling that Life here was not merely mechanical, but what you actually made it, filled him with a sense of peacefulness that he had not experienced for months, if not for years.

The day gradually drew in its light, and shadows lengthened. The bush was slowly being left behind, save here and there where the clumps held enticing boughs for the myriad birds.

At last the driver stopped; "We camp here for to-night," he said shortly—"Can you light a fire, while I see to the team?"

Vance busied himself gathering fuel and soon had a blazing fire ready for the preparation of the evening meal.

They sat at the fireside after supper and smoked in silence for a while, till the driver spoke:

"What-cher going to do up-country?" he asked.

"Oh, just look around," Vance replied nonchalantly.

"Got anywhere to go?" came the enquiry again.

"I reckon there's lots of room up there, isn't there?" petulantly put in Vance:

"Yes, you bet, but have yer got a location? Tain't settled up there, you know: only odd places here and there and one or two squatters at the Crossing, with the Preacher. What's yer business, mate?"

Vance had grown hot. "Before I came up here I was told that everyone minded their own business, but since I've reached these parts it seems to me that my business is everybody's interest," he retorted.

"Well, yer needn't get so huffy about it I reckon," came the gruff reply. "I ain't got to go along with yer I reckon, only a bargain's a bargain—\$75.00 yer recollect, yer was to pay me for dropping yer at the Crossing and my return home."

"\$50.00 was what I agreed with you," said Vance thoroughly roused.

"If yer don't like to be chummy, well its \$75.00, or else I pulls out for home."

Vance sobered down at once; he could see this fellow would have to be humoured.

"Oh, well, we won't quarrel on the price as long as we get there," he said with a forced pleasantness. The other grunted and silence reigned for a space. Then Vance conceived what he thought was a brilliant idea.

"How far have we come?" he asked.



"About forty miles I reckon."

"And you say it's about 102 miles from Grouard to the Crossing?"

"I reckon so."

"Well that makes it 62 miles we still have to go. I'll give you \$62.00 for either of the horses, and when we reach the Crossing I'll sell it back to you when I settle with you."

The driver thought for a long while, then he said shortly, "What's yer game anyway?"

"Gives me an interest in the concern and warrants my getting there I reckon, if the animal holds out."

"I don't see yer game, but let's see yer money and yer can take the brown un—yer'll sell him back to me when we reach the Crossing, eh?"

"Certainly."

"All right then, he's yours, shake!"

"On condition I get a receipt for the money!"

"Yer bet!"

"All right then, shake!"

The money was carefully counted out, passed over and a receipt was laboriously written out by the fire-light and signed by the driver.

"Now then," said Vance slowly, "one of the horses is mine—the brown one. I don't want to be asked any more questions about my doings and, in addition, the price I'm to pay you is \$50.00 as agreed, otherwise you can pull out when you want to and I'll take the brown horse and proceed."

"You give me the \$50.00 right now then," said the other, half rising from the ground.

"Why, I should like to know?"

"I'll tell yer why, it's because I reckon yer got

to go West, that's why yer so blooming sphinx-like over yer movements, see?"

The darkness hid the colour mounting in Vance's cheeks.

"Where's the grub?" he asked and went over to the bags scattered round. "Reckon I'll divvy up some of this stuff with you, pay you the \$50.00 though you haven't earned it and pull out on my horse."

The driver started up. "Say, yer ain't crazy, are yer? How in blue blazes can yer ride a horse, without any harness or anything, sixty-odd miles? How in hell am I to get back with this rig with one horse, forty-odd miles? We'll both lose out I tell yer!"

Vance faced him sternly. "All right then if you play square, so will I. Let's turn in and have an early start, so as we can reach the Crossing to-morrow sure. But now you know me better, you can see I'm no greenhorn to be played with. Are you on?"

The frightened man stared at him and then turning on his heel pulled out some blankets from a bundle. Jerking some towards Vance, he flung some wood on the fire, then spread a double blanket on the ground, crawled on it and wrapped it around himself without a word.

Vance spread out the blankets tossed towards him and lay down, his brain on fire with the episode just ended. Towards morning he fell into a troubled sleep, and it seemed to him but a short while later that he was roused by the driver telling him it was time to think about starting.

Breakfast was hastily eaten, the horses hitched up and, with the bright morning sun, Vance's spirits rose

once more and the night's episode seemed but a dream. A camp for the noonday meal and on again and towards nightfall they reached the Crossing.

A genial clergyman came out from the glare of a lamp in a shack to meet them and gave them a welcome which somehow struck home to Vance. He returned the greetings cordially as the driver sat stoically.

"Staying here long, my friend?" asked the cleric.

"Don't know yet, sir," answered Vance. "Anywhere here I can put up?"

"You are welcome to share my shack if you care to," came the friendly reply.

"You are very kind indeed. Really I have learned a lot about kindness in human nature since I came up here!"

"Yes, it's there, in everyone, only the suspicion which is part of the present-day civilisation hides it, I fear. Come in."

"Here, just a minute," jerked out the driver. "You settle with me right now."

"Well, he can't very well do it in this light, can he?" put in the priest. "Come into my shack and do your settling there," and he led the way into the shack, the other two following.

"Well, here's your \$50.00, and now you give me a receipt for it."

"I reckon I told you it would be \$75.00," came the reply.

"Yes, and to use your familiar phrase, 'I reckon,' you understood quite clearly last night that our original agreement stood, and that was \$50.00."

"I told yer it was \$75.00 I'm telling yer," roared the other.

The other inhabitants, who had heard the approach of the team, drew around the door to hear the controversy. Visitors were few in those parts, and these were quarrelling: lots of excitement for one day!

Vance looked at the man and then at the priest.

"Very well," he said, "here's the \$75.00, and let me have a receipt."

The driver took the money, scrawled out a receipt and started to leave.

"Just a minute there," said Vance shortly. "Father," he asked, "have you a stable in which I can put my horse?"

Before the priest could reply the driver started in.

"What's that!" he yelled. "Your horse? Why, them's both mine. How do yer think I could have driven yer here with one?"

"You seem to have a very convenient memory, my friend," said Vance. "You sold me the brown one last night and I have your receipt here! You see, I foresaw the kind of game you were trying to pull on me, but you don't get away with that sort of thing with me."

"Tain't my writing," yelled the man.

"Let the Father here decide," replied Vance quietly, handing both receipts to him. "Are the signatures the same on both of these documents, sir?"

"They certainly are!"

"Thank you. Now will you help me unhitch my horse, please?"

The driver broke loose again.

"Here, you win! I'll buy back the hoss, here's your \$62.00."

Vance looked surprised; "\$62.00? Why, my price for that horse is \$87.00 and no less. Want it?"

The driver started to give vent to his feelings when the priest stopped him.

"None of that language here," he said sternly, "that's enough; are you going to buy this gentleman's horse or not?"

The driver's voice shook with rage. "Well, I s'pose yer smart, here's yer \$87.00. Now give *me* a receipt."

"Sure," said Vance laughingly, "and next time don't try to put it over a greenhorn, as you imagined."

The man shuffled out of the shack and then turned and shouted at the priest standing beside Vance.

"Yer don't know who yer sheltering, Father. That guy told me he *had* to come West—I'm just warning yer!"

"Thanks," said the cleric gently. "The attraction of the West is most appealing, I know. Good-night."

As he closed the door the priest turned on Vance.

"Was that man speaking the truth when he left?"

"Yes," said Vance, "I had to come West for a while, but as the Sergeant at Grouard told me yesterday, 'if I'm running away from something I should not have done, I can't get away with it even up here.'"

"Are you?" gently came the query.

"I don't know," said Vance thoughtfully.

"How do you mean you don't know if you are running away from something you shouldn't have done?"

The quiet words of the priest brought with a rush

to his memory the paper which he had taken from Irish, and the question he had meant to ask.

"Well, it's just like this," replied Vance, pulling the crumpled billet-doux out of his pocket and handing it to the other; "this will explain. That's my writing. You'll understand."

The priest read it through carefully and then looked at him.

"I think your trip West will do you a lot of good, my friend. Suppose we get to bed."

## CHAPTER X

"FATHER" HENTHLOME, as he was affectionately called, was busy preparing breakfast when Vance opened his eyes next morning and took in his surroundings.

A curtained-off portion of the shack contained two separated sections of a Winnipeg couch, one of which showed signs, by the twisted blankets, of someone having recently occupied it, and the other section held Vance. The presence of little things here and there portraying his host's calling, coupled with the absence of smugness which blights the average clergyman who has not the true vision and broadness of view, somehow had a most soothing effect on Vance. He felt that here, in this rude shack at any rate, no rebellious thoughts or unkind actions of any description could be tolerated. Here, evidently, was a man to whom the average man-in-the-street (that elusive person!) could turn and find a friend. What a gem to find in such an out-of-the-way place! Could there be any truth in the saying which refers to

"Our faltering footsteps led unseen  
To firmer hold and paths serene."

Here, if opportunity offered, would he stay, at any rate for a while until he analysed his very self, and sounded his feelings, emotions, and the depth of his character.

At present the surging waters of his inward conflict prevented that true self-analysis but made him restless.

The priest was very quiet now; he wondered what he was doing and peered through the curtain.

He saw his kindly host lost in his own meditations and beating time rhythmically with his right hand, while in the other he held up a paper from which he had been reading enthusiastically.

Vance got up and, slipping on his clothes, stood between the curtains he had partially drawn.

"Good morning, sir," he said, smiling.

"Good morning to you," came the response, "you are just in time to hear the latest of my effusions."

"Oh, are you a poet too?" jokingly put in Vance.

"Not according to some people who write up columns on what they are pleased to term "Gems from the Latest Effusions in the Poetical Art," and critics in various papers, but still there are some people who are kind enough to express themselves in an appreciative manner regarding my compositions. Your coming here with the object of seeing the Peace River Country has inspired me this morning; I'll read it to you:

### THE PEACE RIVER COUNTRY.

I am the Queen of the Western Lands,  
For years I've been wrapt in hush;  
Known but to trappers and Indian bands,  
And denizens of the bush.

Unharnessed and free are my rivers wide,  
Untilled are my lands so vast;  
My mineral wealth I jealously hide,  
My soil is unsurpassed!



My prairies are barren of cosy homes,  
My bush waits the settler's axe;  
I've a welcome for everyone who comes,  
And labour for willing backs.

I'm like a casket of jewels rare,  
On which but a few have gazed;  
For that look what hardships did they bear!  
But left, by my wealth, amazed!

Vast treasures they've seen in my casket-land,  
And they tell how to find my key;  
When the Iron Horse roars on roads now planned—  
Then roll back my Silence—and see!

Vance listened attentively. "Well, it is certainly just as good, if not better, than some of the stuff that is published. Is the railroad really coming through, do you think?"

"In my opinion there is no doubt. The wonderful Prairie to the southwest of us is rightly named 'Grande,' the mighty river beneath us has even now electric-lighted steamers plying on it, and the amazingly wealthy district on the other side of the Peace River will be the home of millions in the future."

"You talk like a prophet."

"No, my friend, only using a little of my eyesight and common sense. Come and eat, everything's ready. I generally get up early, the mornings are too lovely to waste curled up in bed. How did you enjoy your trip to this Western point?"

"It was rather like the curate's egg, Father, 'good in parts'."

A chuckle greeted this remark.

"The panorama up the Athabasca is magnificent,

don't you think, or was this a period of one of the unsavoury parts you mentioned?"

"No, I was able to enjoy it to the uttermost."

"Yes, I remember coming up there. Here, wait a minute; I wrote a piece on that, too, I remember."

He fumbled about some papers on a side table and at last produced the desired document.

"Here it is," he exclaimed, "want to hear it?"

"Sure," said Vance, unable to repress a smile, "it must be awful having no one on whom to vent your poetic muse."

The cleric smiled in return and read in his mellow voice:

### THE LAST GREAT WEST.

Gliding up the Athabasca,  
In the nippy "Northland Sun"—  
Just a little paddle steamer  
Of about a hundred ton;  
As you feel the engines throbbing,  
See the paddle churning foam,  
Hear the fitful wind a-sobbing—  
All your thoughts, in fancy, roam.

Gliding up the Athabasca,  
With the water just like oil—  
There the bank-sides form a picture!  
(Which man's hand, alas! will spoil)  
As you feel the warmth of sunshine,  
See the clear sky overhead,  
Hear the sweet birds 'mid the jack pine—  
All your thoughts are homeward led.

Gliding up the Athabasca,  
With the treed-banks slipping by;  
All your hopes and spirits ever  
Like the sun are rising high;

As you feel the breezes blowing,  
See how grandly Nature's dressed,  
Hear the countless streamlets flowing—  
You adore the Last Great West!

Gliding up the Athabasca,  
With sweet Nature undisturbed—  
All your worries seem to dwindle,  
For your mind is unperturbed;  
So you feel a diff'rent creature,  
And the views you see bring rest—  
List'ning to the voice of Nature  
"Come, Man, to the Last Great West!"

The days passed all too quickly for Vance, and it seemed when they came to retire each night, that he had known this man who was holding down one of the posts in God's outer empire, for some considerable time. Vance was a good listener, and it had been a source of great delight to his host to read out his poetic effusions to someone who would listen so attentively.

Vance had often thought of the friends he had left behind at Grouard, and wondered how Irish was progressing.

"Funny thing," he remarked one day to his poetical companion "there was that fellow of whom I told you, who was so badly hurt on the voyage up, chumming with me from Athabasca Landing on, and yet we never knew each other's names. I nick-named him 'Irish,' and I never gathered what he called me."

"From what you told me of your conversation with him I should say it would be 'The Cove Who Can't Go Back.' Ha! That's a good title for another little masterpiece—you shall have it with

your breakfast to-morrow—Did I hurt your feelings, my dear fellow?" noticing Vance's drooping head at the title given him.

"I was wondering if that were my true description," replied Vance slowly.

"Well, you see I cannot be any possible judge," said the priest, rising to his feet as he spoke, and retiring behind the curtain; "remember I don't know anything about your reason for coming out here. The note you showed me on your arrival was written by you, you say; how it got into the hands of the person for whom it was intended and back to you I cannot understand."

"I told you it dropped out of Irish's wallet and I took it as I saw it was my handwriting."

"Very well," came the reply; "how do you know the person to whom you wrote it ever received it, and if so how did this man you call Irish come by it?"

"I don't know," said Vance sadly, "he always was saying he was coming West to find a fool."

"Don't be so down-hearted, my friend, then," came the breezy response; "if that's so there's no doubt you will see him again and perhaps the slip of paper may be either a declaration of war or a message of peace. Come to bed."

## CHAPTER XI

THE patient at the Barracks was a patient no longer; in fact, as the Doctor jokingly remarked, "He never had been patient."

Bright, sunny days helped to bring back the strength to the gaunt frame and yet the old spirit was absent. He spent his convalescence in wandering around with his faithful nurse. The Doctor had got in wrong several times by remarking that he did not think the services of the nurse were required any longer, but, blissfully ignoring the side-glances and jokes cracked at his expense, Irish was reconstructing his views regarding the country and every day finding it more attractive.

At last he felt he was fit to travel again, and once more the object of his visit West was uppermost in his mind.

"I'm looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack, I expect," he thought, "but possibly there haven't been many travellers passing through here since Spring opened up.—I'll see the Sergeant."

The Sergeant greeted him with an amused smile—"Liking this country better, aren't you? Finding it very attractive indeed, I think."

"I don't care a damn what you think, Serg. Now I'm stronger I'm pulling out. I've got to find my man. Say, how many travellers has passed through here for up-country since the frost left?"

"Well, that's a hard question in a way; do you mean strangers?"

"Yes."

"Well, there was a party of five went up last week, on an inspection tour of some description . . ."

"No, no, I don't mean parties like that. I mean more like single passengers."

"Well, there haven't been many of that kind; you see the country isn't settled, and it would be foolish to go up there alone, although I do remember, now I've come to think, there was a fellow who was hitting the trail by himself for Peace River Country."

"How long ago?"

"Oh, about four months now."

"I bet that's the fellow I'm after—say, where did that other chap I came up with go to?"

"Oh, sure, he went up-country too. Strange chap. I believe he got in some scrape back East. Couldn't make anything out of him, but I told him as a parting shot if he were running away from anything he should not have done, he couldn't get away with it up here."

"Well, he didn't seem to be that kind of a chap. I suppose I've got to find that other fellow somehow."

"What are you going to do with Nurse?" laughingly put in the Sergeant.

"I'm going to see that little girl to her home on the other side of the Peace River. She may have a dusky skin, Serg., but I tell you she has a white heart. That is the worst of you fellows, you only see the outer side."

"Yes, it takes old Cupid to find the silver lining I expect alright! See you later, I'm busy."

Irish swung out. He was still in a nervous

condition and apt to be testy. The Sergeant's joking had grated on him. She was a fine girl. He hadn't quite realised up to then how much he thought of her. Well, he must think about reaching that fellow with four months' start. It seemed ridiculous but there weren't many places up west he could go to, unless he were a rabbit. He would see what the girl had to say about it.

To his surprise he found himself being made to talk of his late companion. The girl had evidently something on her mind concerning him.

"It isn't him I'm trying to find," he said to her gently. "I want to get to that other fellow who passed through here some four months ago. That may be the chap I want and then my trail west will be ended."

The girl hung her head.

"I'm not saying," he said, gently taking her in his arms, "that I'm going back East after that—Perhaps something may detain me up here."

The girl's eyes shone with delight and then flashed.

"That other fellow who come with you, no good," she said decidedly.

"What makes you say that," he replied rather tartly, thinking of their parting.

"Him steal something from you when you sick; I see him," came the quiet response.

Irish drew in his breath. Was this girl speaking the truth? Was that chap, who was really of different stamp to himself, actually a low-down thief?

He held the girl from him and looked steadily in her eyes.

"Tell me," he said slowly, "what you thought you saw him steal from me."

"Me not know what it was, it was a paper from this," and she tapped his wallet in his pocket.

Irish opened it hastily and hunted through it.

"By God, the dirty thief has taken the very paper which brought me up here! Why didn't you tell me this before?" he demanded.

The girl shrank from him—"You not strong enough; you still weak," she said humbly.

"I've got to get after him and I'll ask the Sergeant to help me!"

With that he tore away from her embrace, and rushed back to the Sergeant in his room.

"Say, you got that fellow sized up alright, Serg. He is a thief, a low-down, cursed thief, that's all; he's stolen the very paper on which I'm relying to find my man."

The Sergeant started to his feet.

"Sure?" he asked firmly.

"Absolutely! It was in my wallet here and the girl saw him take it!"

"Very well, we'll get after him straight away. Are you able to stand the journey to the Crossing? We can trace him from there."

"You bet I am."

"Good, be ready then in half-an-hour," and the Sergeant swung out to give his orders.

The motley party which soon set out from the Barracks presented a peculiar sight. Riding in front was the Sergeant, and behind, in the police conveyance, was a constable acting as driver; Irish and the breed girl.

Irish's feelings were hurt—He had parted company on the most affectionate terms with the strange chum he had picked up at the Landing, and



now he was taking the police to hunt this same chum down. The paper was gone—the girl's statement had linked the loss up with his late companion. Without that paper he couldn't right an unintentional wrong he had done back East. It was all very rotten.

The girl did her best to make his journey more pleasant, but his dark thoughts could not be illuminated for long by her flashing eyes. They had stopped, camped, started again, stopped once more, and it had all been like a bad dream to Irish. He felt feverish; cold sweat broke out on him. Perhaps it was his nerves which were still in a shaky state. He felt strung up to the highest pitch at times, and again, at others, absolutely depressed. This journey was telling on him; he felt his eyes burning and his pulse seemed racing, and it was with a sigh of relief that he at last saw shacks ahead.

"The Landing," whispered the girl, and he pressed her hand to show that he understood.

The party drew up outside the priest's shack, as, on the approach of the new arrivals, he and Vance had come to the door to see the visitors and to hear the latest news.

The Sergeant vaulted down from his horse and approached Vance.

"I reckon you're the man I want," he said brusquely.

Vance started visibly.

"Yes, that's him," shouted Irish, climbing out of the rig.

"What's the idea?" said Vance calmly.

"You dirty thief," roared Irish, "you stole a paper out of my wallet while I was sick; the girl

saw you; come on, 'fess up! where is it?" and he advanced on Vance threateningly.

Vance drew back. "That paper *dropped* from your wallet. I did not take it out and besides it belongs to me, not to you!"

Irish started back with wide opened eyes. "No, you can't pull that stuff on me. You said you were running away from something back East, and maybe it wasn't anything to be proud of, either."

"The paper is certainly in his handwriting," put in the priest gently. "I've seen it and compared it with his own writing."

Irish swayed on his feet; the fever shone in his eyes, his brain was whirling as he faced Vance again.

"Good Lord, you've made me come right out here to tell you you're a damn fool!"

Vance caught him as he fell—"The poor fellow's been sick," he said to the priest, "now he's got a setback; can I take him in to my bed?"

"Certainly."

Vance and the Father gently carried the unconscious form into the shack and behind the curtains.

"Get me some of old Doc.'s tablets out of my grip, will you," said Vance quietly, "he's got a raging fever or else I'm mistaken."

The tablets were given and Vance sat by the bedside to watch, when the curtains parted and the Sergeant stood before him.

"I don't know anything about your defence," he said grimly, "but this man claims you have stolen something from him, and the girl saw you take it. You must consider yourself under arrest. Come with me."

Vance started again, looked at the Sergeant carefully and then at the man lying on the bed.

"When you want me, you will find me here. This man has brought me a message from the Land of Hope!"



## CHAPTER XII

VANCE would never forget that night. He and Father Henthorne took it in turns to sit by the side of Irish, as, despite her protests, the breed girl was taken at once, after Irish's collapse, down to the shore and rowed across to her people.

The struggle in the blizzard and his subsequent illness all came back to Irish in his delirium, and Vance felt the veins nearly bursting in him as he listened to the sick man's ravings.

Little could they do, but let the fever run its course, and hope that the body which had endured so much, was yet strong enough to withstand another deadly assault.

Morning broke at last, casting fitful shadows in the little shack. Then the sun peeped in, and the priest, who had been lying down for a rest after his period of watching, roused himself, dressed and went into the outer room to prepare breakfast.

Somehow the thought of food was distasteful to Vance. His whole mind was centred on this strange man who had thrust himself so many times into his life. What were his feelings towards him now, as compared to those he cherished when he left the farmhouse down East? The sight of the fever-stricken frame swept away all rancour from his breast. The man who had turned a good deed into

the wrecking of his happiness lay before him, and yet he could only feel sorrow surging within him. What had this strange man said so many times that it had become amusing? "I've got to find a chap to tell him what a damned fool he is," and he had gone through all these varied experiences in order to endeavour to play the man to someone unknown to him.

The blood raced in Vance's veins. This man he called "Irish" was after all a better man than he. Irish had played the game to the last, whilst he—well, maybe he had been hasty and unnecessarily jealous, and it all might have been put right if he had but waited. Yet this man, so weak and ill, could alone unlock the sealed past. What if he had been too hasty, if her affections were no longer his? Her burning words, "I must go to him," again and again drummed in his ears. Would this man ever speak again? Could his constitution stand up against Fate's cruel blows? Time alone could tell.

The priest came through the curtains and roused him from his reverie. "Go and have some coffee, it will make you feel better and keep you awake; you haven't had much sleep you know."

Vance got up reluctantly; as he passed out the cleric caught his arm and, with a smile, said, "I have just placed the promised poem, 'The Cove Who Can't Go Back' beside your plate. Remember I have not heard your story and I have just played on my imagination. Don't be hurt!"

Vance sauntered into the outer room, sank in the chair by the table and picked up the poem left there, and these were the words he read:—

## THE COVE WHO CAN'T GO BACK.

Have you ever been out West where there're lots of things to see?

Where there are no questions asked, and where the life is free;

Of the open hand of Friendship and of Welcome there's no lack—

But it's ten to one you're chumming with a cove who can't go back!

Yes, a cove who can't go back to the country of his birth, And 'till his dying day he's a wanderer on the earth;

He's a restless sort of creature 'way from the beaten track,

He's a fellow with a big heart, this cove who can't go back.

You may live with him for weeks, aye and possibly for years,

And a jolly, reckless fellow this "barred-from-home" appears;

But if you catch the meaning of the humping of his back, You will see the home-yearn crushed by the cove who can't go back.

Whatever was his trouble and whatever was his wrong, He's paid the penalty, God knows! in exile there so long; So whene'er you meet a fellow who's running off the track—

Deal gently with him—chances are, he's one who can't go back!

As he finished the last line his head dropped on his arm and he sobbed like a child. At the unusual sound the priest came out from the bedroom. He gently moved up to where Vance sat and said tenderly, "I'm sorry if I hurt you!"

The sobbing went on for a while and then suddenly Vance straightened himself up, mopped his face and said quietly, "In a way it fits me to a 'T,' but that poor chap in there can make a different man of me, if he only talks."

The cleric started. This man was certainly an enigma to him. At times he seemed so open and frank, and on other occasions so morose and secretive. What was the gnawing anxiety on this man's mind? The sick man seemed to be concerned in it too! Well, he could only wait, and trust that the good Lord would see fit to restore the other man to health and so enable this remarkable mystery to be cleared up.

## CHAPTER XIII

THE crisis had passed and Irish's sturdy constitution was once more asserting itself. Father Henthorne and Vance were snatching a mouthful of fresh air outside the shack door.

"We have a handful here, I expect," said the priest, with a laugh. "He's like a denizen of the forest. No sooner feeling better, however bad he's been, than he wants to be up and away!"

"Well, he cannot possibly get about yet," replied Vance; "if so it will undo all our good work and Heaven knows what will happen to him then."

"That's just it, my dear fellow, Heaven knows, but, somehow it sounds strange coming from you. It seems that you present-day chaps just jog along without much thought of anything, higher, and provided things come your way all right, you are contented, but if anything is sent to try you—test you, rather—you seem to think you are badly used. Selfishness I call it. That's the curse of the world to-day!"

"Oh, ho! a sermon, eh?" drawled Vance, but secretly touched.

"No, old chap, I don't believe in sermonizing as you call it. I try to live my belief, and I cannot understand why the majority of you fellows seem to think we clergy are made of different material than the rest of you. We are not. We have only tried



to substitute 'Others' for 'Self,' and the world will never be better until it has swallowed that medicine. Come on into your friend, I hear him calling and his voice sounds much stronger."

Irish greeted them cordially. His eyes shone with his returning health.

"Well, I'm a poor specimen to come out to rough it in the Last Great West!" he said laughingly.

"But you've been tested pretty strongly," replied Vance, and with a sly glance at Father Henthlome (who saw it however), he added, "And through it all you have evidently been thinking, not of Self but of Others."

Father Henthlome laughed heartily. "He's cribbing my 'Sermon,' as he called it, but (sobering) I think from what I have gathered, he has told you the truth. I'm right glad to find there is at least one man who is thinking of others."

Irish blushed furiously. "What are you two teasing me like this for? I don't care, I think a lot of that little girl."

The priest roared again. "Now you are caught!" he jerked out. "Why, neither of us were even referring to your love affair. We were thinking of your going through all these experiences for the sake of playing the man."

Irish immediately became grave. "By jove, that reminds me." He looked at Vance strangely. "My little girl told me she saw you take a paper from my wallet. I remember asking you before about it, but I forget what you said."

"I told you," said Vance slowly, "that the paper *dropped* out of your wallet as I was attending to your wound on the steamer, and I took it because the

writing on it was mine. I intended to ask you, when I had a chance, how you came by it?"

The man on the bed half rose and looked steadily at Vance. Father Henthorne bent over him and felt his pulse.

"Just take it calmly," he said soothingly, "and tell us all you know about this strange paper. It is this man's writing all right. I have personally compared it."

Irish motioned for Vance to come nearer, and taking his hand he said in a low voice, "What is your name?"

The priest bent forward and intently watched the drama.

"Vance Colthorpe."

"Were you ever at a farmhouse down East?"

Vance nodded.

"Did you get there in a blizzard?"

Another nod from Vance.

"Remember saving a chap from freezing to death and ——"

"Yes, yes," burst in Vance, now strung to the highest pitch.

"Well, I'm the man!—shake!"

Vance held the hand motionless. The priest looked at him in surprise. "He asked you to shake hands," he whispered.

Vance continued staring at the man on the bed. "Tell me more, first," he said, moistening his lips.

"There ain't much more to tell," came the response. "All I know is when I came to I was in bed in a farmhouse and a pretty girl was most attentive to me."

"Yes, *most* attentive," Vance interjected.

The other stopped for a minute and looked at Vance strangely again. "I know I've got the right man now, for I came right out West to the Peace River Country where he said he was going, to find a fool!"

"Well, go on," put in Vance shortly.

"I was saying the girl was most attentive, and thanks to her I was able to get round again pretty soon. When I was able to make enquiries about my rescuer, all I could gather was that his name was Vance and that he was a friend of this girl."

"Is that all!" said Vance, dropping the other's hand and going to the window.

"Well, so I gathered, until one day I felt able to sit up. She told me my feet needed medical attention right away and I sure agreed with her, although I didn't let her see how they hurt me—I know I was jollying her and thanking her for the kindness she had shown me, when she ran out of the room and dropped a piece of paper. I called to her but she did not hear, and then, without thinking any harm, I managed to pick it up and read it. By jove, I was stunned for the minute. I never dreamt this man Vance had taken it the way he had, and I was determined that because he had been such a decent scout to me I would go after him and tell him to go back to that girl and not be a fool. Why I never felt anything in that line towards her, only full of thanks. Will you shake now?"

Vance walked back slowly from the window. "Sure I will! Not another man in my opinion would have troubled to have set such a matter right as you have tried to do. But you forget, old chap, there's

another side to the story—her side—and that's what's goading me!"

"Oh, pshaw!" broke in the priest. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder, you know!"

"Yes, and that man has been absent too, you must remember," retorted Vance.

"What did you come out all these miles to tell this man?" said Father Henthorne, turning to Irish and pointing to Vance.

"Just what he is about that girl—just a damned fool!"

"Well," laughed his enquirer, "I can't re-echo your remarks, but I think the idea's right, and although you sneered at my "preaching" a little while ago, Vance Colthorpe, you would do well to rouse yourself and copy your friend here—think not of Self so much but more of Others! Hark! Rain at last. Just a thunderstorm. Very much like episodes in most of our lives."

With that he strode to the door and opening it stood there gazing at the downpour.

The two men sat watching him. They realised here was a strong character, built up on sincerity and pulsating with the sheer joy of living. As they watched, the inevitable piece of paper was whipped out by the priest who wrote hastily, read it over, and came back to where they were.

"Beautiful thunderstorm!" he exclaimed, "and I've got it down here with the thought of other dark clouds hovering over our lives, listen:

## A THUNDERSTORM.

Dark clouds are all around  
And shade the sun;  
Now dropping on the ground,  
The rain's begun.

The thirsty flowers do greet  
The fresh'ning rain,  
Knowing that soon they'll meet  
The sun again.

And see the storm is o'er,  
The dark grows light;  
No more the rain doth pour,  
The sun shines bright.

So when dark clouds appear  
On Life's rough way;  
The world seems dull and drear  
Each weary day,

Take this sweet thought of cheer,  
Though Hope seems done,  
Dark clouds will roll away—  
Forth bursts the sun!

“Get those two last lines, Colthorpe?”

Dark clouds will roll away—  
Forth bursts the sun!

## CHAPTER XIV

"WELL, I never saw anyone act more like a caged lion in my life," growled Vance as he watched Irish prowling up and down the shack.

"Come, come," laughed Father Henthlome, "you must remember he has to do his 'daily dozen' to wear off the effects of the floor bed. But seriously speaking, old chap, now you've eased your conscience by finding Vance and delivering your candid opinion, I suppose you will both go back hand in hand like two good little school boys and have a regular jolly party at the old farmhouse—leaving poor me up here."

"Not for me," ejaculated Irish, "I've grown to like this country——"

Vance roared with laughter. Irish blushed furiously. "If the parson weren't here I'd tell you exactly what I think of you," he spluttered.

The owner of the shack smiled. "Any difference to what you thought before?"

"Well, it's just like this. I'm ready to admit I didn't think much of this country at first, but somehow it grows on me." Stepping in front of the priest he said earnestly, "You understand, sir, what I mean, don't you? I've had time to think and I reckon there's a time when a fellow's got to admit that things take on a different aspect when looked at from the right angle. I reckon I'll plan to stay up

here." He reached for his hat and jerked out, "Why you fellows mooch in here on a day like this beats me. I'm going out!" and with that he strode out.

"Another budding poet, Father," laughed Vance.

"Yes," replied the other, "he has heard the voices of river, wood and stream and he's young and free I suppose, so the extraordinary call of the West is finding an answering echo within him."

"I don't think it's altogether the voices of the things you mention. I fancy it is the voice of one individual—a girl—that has changed him."

"Yes, and I believe he is not the only one whom the voice of an individual—a girl—has changed."

Vance started, but their talk was interrupted by the door being flung open by Irish. Irish in a glow of health and happiness.

"Going to Grouard," he sang out. "I've got the idea! I'm going to file on a homestead in the Grande Prairie. Incidentally I'll tell the Sergeant chap it's all right between you and me, Vance. So long! See you perhaps on my return—Hullo, here's grandpa!"

A wizened breed tottered up to the doorway.

"Le Pere est ici?" he asked.

Father Henthlome stepped forward; "Oui, mon ami."

"Avez-vous vu l'homme au nom de 'Ireesh,' Monsieur le Pere?"

"Il est ici, mon ami," replied the Father, pointing to Irish.

The old breed turned on Irish and poured out a torrent of French.

"Tell him, Father, I don't understand a word he says."

"Que voulez-vous lui dire?" asked the priest of the irate breed.

"Ma fille, Mimi Touche, est malade a cause de lui."

"He says," interrupted the priest, "his daughter, Mimi Touche, is sick owing to you."

"Pining for love!" ejaculated Vance.

"Shut up," growled Irish. "Ask him if he understands English, Father."

"Parlez-vous Anglais?" said the priest to the old man, who had been looking from one to the other bewildered.

"Ver leetle."

"Ah, that's better," exclaimed Irish, "I can make him understand. You," putting his hand on the old man's shoulder, "Mimi's father?"

The old man grunted.

"She—want—me?"

Another grunt.

"Good, — I—want—her—I—go—with—you—to—her—see?"

The old man looked at Irish steadily.

"Comprenez-vous?" exclaimed the priest.

"Oui! He good man, oui?"

"Yes. Let—him—go—with—you."

The old man's face lighted up and putting one hand on Irish's shoulder, he raised his other and pointed out across the mighty Peace.

"You come over there?"

"Yes—now."

The two moved off together, the old man still keeping his hand on the other's shoulder, and so they passed down to the waterfront and out of sight.

Father Henthlome stood looking after them for a



long while, and then slowly went indoors and, evidently deep in thought, mechanically shut the door.

"Funny business," said Vance smiling, breaking the silence at length.

"Well, there's one man who knows what he wants all right and is willing to stand by the woman of his choice."

Vance winced.

"Yes," continued the priest, "there's many a smartly-dressed pharisee, jealously attentive to the outward shows of religion, but the man who has the right idea of what the Founder of Christianity meant, is the one who plays the game straight all life's journey through. The fact is that true religion hasn't penetrated the understanding of the average man and woman of to-day. You hear of the churches being sparsely attended and the golf courses and amusement places crowded; that's what I couldn't stand in the cities. The gross selfishness, the fiddling about with trifles while burning issues are at stake, made me realise that these same people, who are so fond of rocking the boat of life, show the shallowness of their minds, and that they have not sounded the depth of realities.—Let's go for a walk."

## CHAPTER XV

THE memory of that walk stayed with Vance for many days: little things, which he had considered trifles, were lifted to the dignity of gems in Father Henthlome's descriptions. Here was a mind which indeed could penetrate beneath the surface of things, and seemed to hold the key of many hidden treasures. On the high banks of the Peace they stood, and looked at the mighty waters beneath them.

"Gives us food for thought, my friend," said the priest quietly. "Look at the epitome of Constancy and Never-failing; look at that river, ever going forward to something bigger, the mighty sea."

Vance was indeed not only restless, but exceedingly uncomfortable in mind. This strange man, whom he had known but a short time, had touched chords within him which had stirred his whole nature. The priest bent down and plucked a bit of brush.

"Here's something I like too," he said looking steadily at Vance, "it always puts backbone into me."

"How?" exclaimed Vance, nervously, as he felt there was something behind the other's words. This man was preaching in a way he had never heard before.

"Well, it stands up against all the cold rebuffs of the wind, the snow comes upon it quietly under the guise of friendship but soon joins forces with the

enemy wind and shakes its very vitals with the blizzard; yet through it all this little tenacious thing is not carried away but sits here waiting for the return of its friend the sun. It knows it will come back as its friendship was so warm. It is the daily reminder of tenacity and faith."

Vance stood looking far away. His face was burning. This man had told him, not openly, but in so many words, what he thought of him. Irish had told him bluntly, but this man had expressed himself in a way which seemed to pinch his very pride. He was angry—angry with himself. He realized he had been a fool, but it wasn't anyone else's business and——

The priest was looking at a dead blossom in a strange manner, then, looking steadily across the Peace, he said, quietly as if to himself:

"But, yesterday this flower was in full bloom,  
Its fragrance pure and sweet, its colour bright,  
But now, alas, the stem is wrapt in gloom,  
Its glory, see, has vanished in the night!

The summer sun arises with great power,  
It sheds a burning heat and dazzling light,  
But tho' its glory lingers hour by hour,  
*The warmest sun grows cold towards the night!*

Love! Ardent love throws out its glowing rays,  
It scorches ev'ry soul that feels its breath—  
The unfed fire dies out in a few days—  
But true love's flame burns till the hour of death!"

They stood there in silence for a while and then Vance broke out: "There's a boat coming across the river. I'm going down to see who it is," and with

mingled feelings he strode off. Father Henthlome looked at the retreating form, and a smile gradually spread over his face.

"Pride pretty hard hit, I reckon. Well, perhaps this trip out West will have a salutary effect on him."

He looked round on the scenes he loved so well, and with a sigh of contentment, retraced his way to his shack.

In the meantime Vance had reached the shore where soon after, a canoe grounded and Irish jumped out, followed by the breed girl and the old man.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Irish. "Still here? I thought you might have gone by now—anyway you can be my best man!"

Vance virtually jumped.

"Your what?" he exclaimed.

"My best man. Mimi and I are going to be married to-day if Father Henthlome will do the trick."

"But—you—she—"

"Yes, I know," replied Irish, looking steadily at Vance; "I know what you think, but she is white inside I tell you, and I'm not going to let stinking pride stop me from playing white to her. Help the old man up to the shack and get some of the meaning of the free West into your damned stuck-up head."

Vance said nothing, but gave his arm to the old breed and walked slowly up to the shack. He was raging inwardly. They all were trying to put him in the wrong and show him up to be jealous and proud.

The little company reached the shack and Vance opened the door for the old man, but the place was empty.

Vance looked around and saw a note pinned on the curtain, which he read. "At the Church" was the laconic message.

He felt puzzled. This wasn't Sunday; why had this man suddenly gone to church. Turning round he explained the situation.

Irish seemed tickled.

"Let's all go there," he exclaimed, and giving his arm to the girl, walked off, followed by Vance and the old man. To their surprise, they found the priest evidently waiting for them, and he seemed to read their astonishment in their eyes.

Turning to Irish, he said quietly: "My friend, when I knew the determination in your character, and when I saw you go so readily with this girl's father this morning, I thought to myself, that man will play the game. When your friend here told me there was a boat coming across the river, I concluded my faith in you had been justified, and although I did not know who was in that boat, I pictured its occupants just as I see them before me and I thought perhaps my services might be required."

The smile broke down all restraint, and the priest found his answer in the look which passed between Irish and the girl.

Going to the old man, Father Henthlome said gently: "This—is—your—wish—too?"

"Oui, Monsieur."

"There—will—be—some—things," added the priest, carefully emphasizing each word, "which—you—will—not—understand—in—the—service—perhaps,—but—you—will—see—the—service—and—witness—that—you—saw—it?"

The old man nodded.

"Come—up—to—the—front,—please—and—wait—there—while—I—robe."

The little party moved forward, Vance in a half-dream. Only to think that a few months ago he was a staid business man back East, and now here he was witnessing a most remarkable marriage ceremony in a little log church away in the West:

His thoughts were checked by the words of the priest solemnly repeating the service. It was soon over, and the register signed after great difficulty, as the old man could not write, and in addition it all had to be explained to him before he made his cross on the book. But here they were on their way back to the shack for a wedding feast—nothing more than the usual food it is true, but tasting as nectar to at least two of them.

Irish got to his feet at last, and declared his intention of going to Grouard after all, but this time it would be his honeymoon. He left with the old man whom he was taking down to the boat, and soon returned with a team, and shook hands warmly with Father Henthrome.

Vance was raging inwardly once more and filled with jealousy over the sight of this man's happiness. When Irish came up to say good-bye, he saw the angry look in Vance's eyes, and his hand dropped to his side.

"Say, you spoilt pup," he exclaimed, "are you still harbouring rotten feelings towards me and that lady down East?"

Vance's eyes gleamed but he said nothing.

Irish grabbed his wrist. "Look," he said sternly, "what would you have had that girl of yours do? Take your poosey-woosey head in her lap and gaze

all the time into your dear little eyes, or do as she did—be an out and out woman, do the duty which lay at her hand and stow the sentiment till there was time for it. Be a man, Vance, and not a silly, sickly, sentimental pup—Good-bye!”

## CHAPTER XVI

FATHER HENTHLOME sat chuckling to himself as he turned over his carefully thought out plan. He could hear Vance restlessly moving about behind the curtain and so it seemed an appropriate moment to start action. With deliberation and with great dramatic force he started to read his latest poetical effusion:

### THE DEATH OF HIS HEART-QUEEN.

One last long fond embrace,  
Heart close to heart—  
One kiss on thy dear face . . .  
And we must part!

One last hand-clasp of thine,  
While tear-drops start—  
Shall morrow's sun dare shine . . .  
Since we must part?


One last sweet look from thee,  
With those dear eyes—  
Alas! she's fled from me . . .  
To Paradise!

Vance had come through the curtains long before the end of the oratorical outburst.

"What stuff is that you are spouting, Father?" he enquired testily.

"It was the vivid description of a dream I had of a





dear young girl who had been living on life's greatest hope, but who had been denied enjoying its fulfilment through an early death."

Father Henthlome looked at Vance through squinting eyes. Yes, his scheme was working well so far. The other was evidently in a highly wrought-up condition.

"Wonder," he mused, "if there are many deaths really caused by broken hearts."

"Oh, I don't know!" retorted Vance. "It's a delightful subject to talk about, isn't it?"

"Yes, I feel so moved this morning. I seem to see the sadness in such a scene as I have described in my poem. It grips one, if I do say it. Awful to die without enjoying life's greatest gift—Love, isn't it? Blighted hope; disappointed love; broken heart . . . death! Ah! it is a sure sequence."

"Oh damn!"

Father Henthlome jumped to his feet. "I beg your pardon, Vance, but did I hear you correctly?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sorry I suppose, but I'm nearly frantic. I don't know what to do!"

Father Henthlome smiled as he averted his head. "What's your trouble? What I have said doesn't affect you, does it? *You* never thought of anyone like that, did you?"

The pent-up emotion burst forth at last.

"You bet I did! You may laugh at me if you like, but that girl down East is all the world to me!"

"She must be!" retorted the priest smiling. "That is why you are away up here I suppose. Yes, it is a queer way of showing your deep regard and affection for her. It reminds me of the way present-day folks have of showing their deep affection for church!"

"Well, I thought it was best to examine my feelings from a distance——"

"Yes, as I said, some people like to examine their religion from the big end of field glasses! Well, you have queer ideas I say. Yet perhaps it will save you many a heartache if you try to settle down here with me. Who knows? Perhaps another Mimi may come along." He smiled curiously as he spoke.

"I tell you, Father, I can't stick it any more. I'm going back East!"

The priest's eyes opened in amazement. "Going back East?" he said slowly.

"Yes, I reckon I was a fool to come West like I did, but I've taken my medicine from you all and I'm going *back*, back to tell a certain girl that a strange man's opinion of me was the absolute truth."

Father Henthorne moved to the door and opened it, gazing thoughtfully out. Yes, he would miss this impulsive fellow. He had certainly enjoyed his companionship, but personal enjoyment must not stand in the light of bringing out the real man in this friend. No! his work would be his solace and he would find companionship there!

The old twinkle came back into his eyes. "Do you think this girl down East will like a man who answers to the description given by our mutual friend, Irish?" he said teasingly.

"That was my character in the past, maybe, but I'll show her I'm different in the future."

"Well, if you are so insistent on leaving me you had better get a lift with the mail man. He's just leaving."

Vance jumped to his feet and began packing furiously.

The priest looked at him with the twinkle still in his eyes. "Don't you think you had better stay and forget the lady you left so abruptly down East? She may be engaged to someone else . . . or married . . . or moved away . . . or even dead or anything may have happened since you last saw her and told her by your leaving how much you thought of her!"

Vance snapped his grip with a bang.

The mail drove by and Father Henthlome waved to the driver and shouted a farewell. At the same moment an excited figure burst out of the shack, bumped into its occupier, shook his hand vigorously and ran after the mail carrier shouting lustily. The mail stopped and the runner climbed aboard. The watcher at the shack door stood still with the twinkle in his eyes—or was it the light of another deed well done?

The mail stage passed out of sight, and the heavenly sentinel in that frontier outpost, with a smile of deep satisfaction, went indoors.

"Well, well," he chuckled, "things do happen even up in this quiet place. A wedding, and a man whose manhood has been stirred in him. I wonder if he will ever think of me again! Perhaps the poet, Longfellow, my companion in thought for hours, wrote under similar circumstances those exquisite lines about 'Ships that pass in the night'!" . . . . He settled into a chair and placed the Old Book on his knees in preparation for his daily meditation, and then thoughts of his late visitor stirred in him again.

"Ah, yes, indeed, 'Ships that pass in the night.'! Well, he has certainly gone on the full tide of enthusiasm, and I wish him 'Bon Voyage'!"

## CHAPTER XVII

"GOING far?" queried the mail driver.

"Yes, right south," exclaimed Vance, "just as fast as I can go."

"Ain't been in long, have yer?"

"No, but I find I've got to get back right away."

"Sims my name, been driving this 'ere buckboard for nigh on twenty years; had the misfortune to lose one of my 'orses last week and so 'ad to break in a new one, that off'n there; ain't quite broke but this life will soon do the trick I reckon."

Vance felt the shaking of the rickety conveyance, and glanced with an anxious eye at the none too steady animal in front of him.

"Seems to want quite a bit of taming, doesn't he?" he suggested.

"Yep, but guess a run or two will take all the devil out of 'im. Looking for land, Mr. —, what did yer say your name was?"

"I never said, but you can call me 'Sir,' if a name I must have," said Vance shortly. He could not catch on to the intimate ways prevalent in this part it appeared.

"Did you say you 'ad been looking for land, Mr. Sir?" the driver persisted."

"I did not," retorted Vance.

"What did yer say yer were doing; bain't looking over the route of that 'ere railroad they talks of, was yer, Mr. Sir."

"No."

The driver looked puzzled and silence reigned for a while.

"Say," he said at last, "I'll tell yer some advice; when folks asks yer anything up 'ere, it ain't to pry into yer secrets, it's to 'ear a fellow chirp back; the majority of 'em don't care a darn about yer business, if only a fellow ain't a pesky sphinx. One can't talk to the view all the time, nor to the 'orses, tho' I do do a lot of the latter, and the one that died knowed what I meant too, I warrant. Ain't you the bloke what 'ad the voicey overture with Dib Sparrow a few weeks back at the Crossing, over 'is charge for driving?"

"Yes, that was I," replied Vance, forcing himself to speak.

"Say, you sure 'ad 'im tied up good—look, ever see a finer view than what we get from this crest?"

Vance allowed his eyes to wander round in admiration—No wonder tales went forth of that wonderful land. Open land stretching as far as his eyes could see, broken here and there by clumps of bushes, their colourings wonderfully blended and everything seeming to speak of vastness. Below, in the valley they were descending, was another type of scenic beauty; trees and water, ragged cliffs and winding trail. The smell of verdant foliage and moist earth was a sweet smelling incense and seemed to soothe the jaded nerves of Vance.

"Our camp's just around the corner," broke in the driver, "and looks like as if we'll 'ave company for supper."

As they neared the bottom of the hill a figure loomed large on the left side of the trail at the edge

of the bushes. As they came nearer they could see he was drunk, uproariously drunk. Just as they were passing he uttered a wild whoop and whirled a once-white shirt around his head, shouting lustily.

That was sufficient for the half-broken horse, and away he started, the mail-driver hanging on to the lines with all his strength and calling out vain reassuring words. The rickety democrat swayed about in an alarming manner, and just as they passed the place where evidently the stranger had established himself, the inevitable happened; something broke and Vance was pitched out headlong, striking his left leg sharply against an obstacle in falling. Excruciating pain told him at once what had happened, and then noise, clamour and tumult faded from his memory.

When he came to himself, the mail driver was anxiously bending over him.

"Got a nasty jar, pard," he exclaimed. "That pesky drunken fool just plumb upset my little Major, just as I got 'im settling down nicely too—Are you 'urt much?"

"Reckon my leg's broken," faintly responded Vance,

"Eh! That's bad! Let's see. Gosh darn it, yer're right, and in two places or I'm a Dutchman. Drat that fool—I 'ad no end of trouble to stop that team, but they're as quiet as lambs over there now. Reckon we'd best make yer comfortable and get an early start for the Police Doctor at Grouard to-morrow. Gosh darn it, ain't that too bad!" The old man went on muttering as he potted around.

"'Ere comes that drunken fool now. 'E's squatting on our camping grounds too."

The staggering man, still roaring out something unintelligible, and continually waving the shirt, came up, and, with a drunken leer, looked down at Vance. Recognition shot from one to the other immediately.

"Ho, ho; if it ain't my old friend the gallant rescuer of the beautiful dusky beauty. Ha!" Then changing his tone and advancing threateningly on the prostrate man, "Yer got me fired, you did, you and your pal and sweetheart breed."

Standing erect as far as he was able, he accosted the mail-driver.

"Say, Joe, what's ailing him, eh? Looks kind of knocked out, ha, ha."

"Leg broken bad, thanks to you and your pesky shirt and shouting."

"Broken leg, eh? Ho, ho, that's a good one on you, Mr. Gallant Rescuer, ha, ha, ha, broken leg! What a joke!" and still laughing, he staggered off.

## CHAPTER XVIII

VANCE was in fearful pain. There was no one to set his broken limb, and it would be hours before they could get in touch with the Police Doctor. He grasped at once that he would be unable to continue his journey south for some time, and now he must write a letter advising of his whereabouts, and ascertaining how matters stood with Linda Faunch. As he thought of her, all his tender feelings, brought to the surface by his physical and mental anguish, passed plainly before him, and he saw the one true object of his affections clear and sharp in his mental vision, realizing that it was Linda, and she alone, who was indelibly imprinted on his memory.

The mail-driver, now with a lantern, moved slowly about the hurriedly made camp, and presently came up with something steaming in his hand.

"Say, if yer can swallow some of this, I reckon it will 'elp yer some. I ain't no 'and at doctoring, but I'll get yer into Doc. Forbes' 'ands just as soon as daylight allows."

Vance drank the proffered concoction thankfully, and almost immediately the powerful sedative had its effect. The mail-driver stole back to the sleeping man's side after a while.

"Reckon 'e'll stay until we reach the Doc all right. Well, we might as well get 'im fixed up on the buggy floor right away, while 'e doesn't feel the moving. Where's that darnation fool! Suppose 'e's sleeping



off 'is drunk, but I've got to 'ave 'is 'elp. I ain't no elephant to lift a body with a broken leg on to a rig. Why can't a fellow 'ave 'is drink in a real civilized way I asks! Get into yer shack with yer bottle; lock the door, 'ang the key right up 'igher than yer 'ead so yer can't reach it till yer fit to go out again, and then enjoy yer likker—Yer can't go scaring around then, and besides yer don't 'ave to share it with anyone. This 'ere whooping round frightening folk and smashing things ain't decent."

A loud snore proclaimed the proximity of the drunk. Sims kicked him awake with a vicious joy.

"Get up, Cap., and 'elp me get a 'uman cargo aboard my four-wheeled schooner on the lower deck."

The human derelict got slowly to his feet.

"What be the game?" he growled.

"Come over 'ere and 'elp me get this fellow, whose leg yer got broke, on my rig."

"Not me, he deserved all he got. He got me fired from my boat, that's what he did, and curses on him."

"Well, I ain't saying 'e's an angel nor nothing, but I'm responsible for 'is safety to Grouard and——Cap., yer'll not see me stuck, I reckon. You and I 'ave been purty fricksome together up to now, ain't we? Come on, lend me an 'and!"

The Captain gave in with a bad grace, and the two men at last had Vance lying as comfortably as possible in the bottom of the democrat. The Captain turned round with an oath.

"'Taint for him I helped you, Sims; I wouldn't lift my hand to aid him this side of eternity, and I'll get quits with him yet."

"Yer got a mighty löng memory, Cap., for some things, but I reckon the bite's been took out of yer, sommat, and yer bark's the only thing that's left. Well, there's a streak of dawn over yonder and I might just as well feed the 'osses, get myself some grub, and 'it off right early. Sorry I 'ad to trouble you, Cap.; mebbe when we next meet we can chink-chink together; I'll see what I can rustle while I'm down, s'long."

The Cap. slunk off again to his sleeping quarters, and the mail-driver wandered off and soon came back bringing the horses, which he fed. He lit a fire, ate breakfast and then took another look at Vance.

"Reckon I ought to give 'im another drop of that stuff. It'll keep 'im quiet and free from pain anyway. Good job the Cap. didn't scent it or it would 'ave been all downed in no time."

With great difficulty he poured the liquid down the insensible man's throat, and with satisfaction saw the head go back with a dull thud.

"That'll keep yer quiet I reckon until we 'it the Barracks," and, climbing down from the rig, he hitched up the team, loaded the stores, doused the fire and started off.

The want of sleep and the added responsibility made him all the more anxious to reach his destination. The passing picture above him betokening the breaking of day; the majestic rising of the full-bloom sun, and the countless call of birds, all passed unheeded by him this time. He was too full of what he would tell the Sergeant.

"If 'e knew that the Cap. was drunk, and, in 'is drunken mood was responsible for the injury to this man through 'is gentle Major bolting, well, there

would be something doing. And the Cap. knew this chap, too, and didn't seem to like 'im neither. Well, the Cap. always *was* particular regarding 'is likes and dislikes, so mebbe there *was* something queer about this fellow anyway. Perhaps the Sergeant knew 'im and mebbe that would 'elp out awkward explanations."

The sun was high now and the air was hot. He wondered if the fellow under him were still asleep. Pulling up he took a hasty glance at Vance and found him still insensible to the world around him.

"Reckon I don't stop for no lunch to-day," he muttered to himself, whipping up the team again. "I calculate I'll get this 'uman freight landed afore I eats."

The hours passed and at last the driver took a keener interest in his surroundings.

"Get up, Major, get up, Betsy, there's the Barricks right forrard and old Doc. on 'is 'orse right at the gate."

The conveyance pulled up by the Barracks' entrance.

"'Ullo, Doc." came the greeting, "reckon I've got a job 'ere for you."

The Doctor rode slowly up, smiling.

"There doesn't look much the matter with you, Sims," he exclaimed, "and I see, wonderful to relate, your chariot has come through another ordeal. It must be strongly tied together."

The speech ended in a roar of laughter.

"Take a look in the rig, Doc.," replied the driver soberly.

The Doctor looked in and his face immediately became grave.

"Hullo, what happened, Sims, where did you find this man?"

"Picked 'im up at the Crossing, Doc., as a passenger going south, but Major there shied 'im out of the rig and broke 'is leg."

The Doctor swung his horse round and, jumping down, opened the Barracks gate. As he did so a bell rang in the Barracks, and the Sergeant and a constable immediately appeared on the scene.

"What's wrong, Sims," sang out the Sergeant.

"Got a man with a broken leg, Serg."

"All right, bring him right in."

As they lifted the still insensible form out of the conveyance the Sergeant took a sniff at his lips.

"Drunk," he muttered, "dead drunk. Where did you get him, Sims?"

"Brought 'im as a passenger from the Landing. Said 'e was going south. Told me to call 'im 'Sir.'"

"Oh, he did, did he," said the Sergeant, laughing, "and did you?"

"Sure, I ain't to know what a man's name is unless 'e tells me."

The Doctor and the Sergeant both roared.

"Had you nicely, Sims, didn't he! Did you call him 'Sir' or 'Mr. Sir'?"

"Mr. Sir, sure 'e weren't over friendly."

"No?" queried the Sergeant, "wasn't his leg broken then?"

"No, Major bolted and threw 'im out."

"Oh, and then you gave him a sleeping draught, eh?"

"Yep, 'ad to get 'im 'ere."

"Sure," mused the Sergeant; "well, Sims, you're

a queer one all right. But let's get the fellow in before he wakes up; he's coming to now if I'm not mistaken."

They carried Vance into the same room which had been formerly occupied by "Irish," and then the Doctor set his leg immediately. The added pain evidently offset the effects of Sims' draught, for Vance woke up. His first glance fell on the Doctor and then he sighted the Sergeant.

"Hullo," he said, faintly, "never thought I would see you again like this. Rather crabs my intentions. On my way out, Serg., but I reckon I'll have to stay around here for a while, eh, Doc.?"

"Yes, quite a time."

"Will either of you chaps write a letter for me, I wonder? I want to catch the mail."

"Doc.'s a good hand at that, I reckon," said the Sergeant smiling. "I'll get the paper and pen."

The Doctor kept his finger on Vance's pulse while the Sergeant was out.

"Do you all the good in the world to take things quietly for a bit," he said.

"Rather a hard job when the mind isn't easy, isn't it, Doc.?"

"Well, set your mind at ease then."

"That's what I'm going to do right now, if you will just write what I say."

"A confession, eh?" put in the Sergeant, coming in with the writing materials.

"Yes," responded Vance, "but not a legal one. Well, Doc., if you are ready I want to make my confession to Miss Linda Faunch."

The Sergeant winked at the Doctor and stole quietly out.

## CHAPTER XIX

"LETTER for you, Linda," sang out Mrs. Gettling, "and I don't know the writing nor the funny place where it's from."

Her sister bounced into the room.

"How exciting," she exclaimed and tore the envelope open eagerly.

"It's from Vance," she said slowly, "and he's ill with a broken leg up at Grouard."

"That isn't Vance's writing," put in Mrs. Gettling.

"No, he's got the Police Doctor to write for him. And, oh, Madge, he's met the man who was here whom he rescued in the blizzard and the man told him——"

"Yes, what did the man tell him?" burst in the other.

"Well, I can't tell you," said her sister, colouring, "but anyway it's all right!"

"What's all right?" ejaculated Gerald Gettling who had come in and had heard part of the conversation.

"Oh, just *everything*, and now I must write and tell him I am coming up to him."

Mrs. Gettling put her milk bucket down with a crash.

"Tell him what, Linda? Going to him? Up in that awful wild country where there's Indians and snakes and wild buffaloes and everything? Why, you

must be crazy. It's miles away from anywhere and no one knows where it is!"

"That's rather mixed, ain't it?" put in her husband, "if you don't know where it is, how can you tell how far it is? But anyway I agree with you, Linda's crazy to think of going and especially to a fellow who skipped like he did, and left her."

The colour flamed in the girl's face.

"Thank you both so much for your advice," she said shortly, and left the room.

Husband and wife sat silent for some time. Gerald was fixing a bit of harness, and Madge was busy "mealing" as she called it.

Presently the silence was broken by Linda coming in dressed for riding.

"Going to town, Madge," she said quietly, "anything I can do for you?"

Both Madge and Gerald looked up at once, struck by the queer note in her voice.

"What are you going to do in town, Linda?" asked Madge with arms akimbo.

"Going to mail this letter to Vance for one thing and also going to find out where this place Grouard is located. I've told him I am coming to him as soon as I can."

Gerald jumped to his feet.

"You're going to him?" he exclaimed, "and yet you don't know where the place is? Sounds like some cheap novel—heroics they call it, I reckon."

The girl made no reply, and Madge's arms fell loosely to her sides as she turned to her work. Linda walked quietly out of the house and soon after they saw her at full gallop off to town.

"What do you think of that?" asked Gerald.

"It's very awkward," slowly replied his wife. "I've got my jam and pickles to do and it will sure be an awful chore rushing them all when I get back."

Gerald jumped to his feet.

"What's got over this place? What d'you mean? 'When you get back?' You aren't going! It's Linda what's got this mad streak in her!"

"Gerald Gettling, you don't mean to stand there and say you can't see it's imperative I go along with Linda? If anything should happen to her in that wild country I'd never forgive myself, besides it isn't right for a young girl to go up there alone. She's going—you can reckon on that! When Linda makes up her mind you can't turn her. I'd as soon try to turn a runaway team as turn her. I don't know what to do or say. Whatever did Vance want to go away up there for, beats me, and what he wants to go and break his leg, if he has broken it, and it isn't a ruse to get Linda up there, I can't imagine. Why couldn't he wait to break his leg, if he did want to do it, until he got back to civilized parts!"

"Your philosophy doesn't somehow penetrate me. Do you think anyone chooses the time and place of accidents or hurts? Anyway it looks like a contrite lover's gag."

"Well, gag or no, he's got that poor girl just all worked up. Men are always unreasonable; they never think of the consequences of their deeds. Now take yourself——"

"I am, Madge, I'm taking myself right now off to do my work; you can't start your arguments and explanations using me for bait."

Laughing, he picked up his hat and went out.



Madge set to work with renewed energy. All the time she was going over in her mind the sudden turn of events since the arrival of that letter.

Of course Vance might be sick, poor boy. Well, it was nice that he wanted Linda after all, though it was a queer way of courting. Now when Gerald was courting her . . . . She let her arms stay idle as she stood dreaming of her own past. How long she was lost in reverie she did not know but Linda brought her to with a jerk as she swung herself in with a businesslike air, carrying maps and a parcel.

"Hullo, Madge, I've got all the information. It's up at the further end of Lesser Slave Lake. A steamer goes up from Athabasca Landing and there is a clergyman and the Mounted Police and Revillon's Store and the Hudson Bay."

"Gosh, you are crammed full of facts, Linda, but have you calculated how to get from here to that queer-named Landing Place?"

"Yes, we go by train to Edmonton and take the mail stage from there, one hundred miles."

"And drive a hundred miles with a strange man, Linda?"

Her sister looked at her in astonishment.

"Others have done it, why can't I?"

"But what would people say, driving a hundred miles with a strange man?"

"Don't be a goose, dear, I'm not running away with him. It's a business matter only, and I'll keep him in his place you can rest assured."

"But Linda, what about my pickles and jam? When am I going to do them?"

"Well, my going won't interfere with your work, I hope. I know it will give you more to do, but you

were doing it all by yourself before I came, you remember."

"Yes, but don't you see our going away for goodness knows how long, will delay me awful, and then I shall be worrying about Gerald all the time too, I know."

Linda's eyes opened in amazement.

"Whatever do you mean? 'Our' going away! You aren't coming with me?"

"I surely am if you persist in going. Why, Linda, do you think I could let you go up there in that wild country by yourself!"

The younger girl flung her arms around her sister.

"You dear old goose, why there's *everything* up there which makes life worth while."

Madge held her at arms' length and looked tenderly at her.

"Yes, dear, I believe for you there is everything up there which makes life worth while!"

## CHAPTER XX

THE "getting ready" had taken much longer than had been anticipated. Mrs. Gettling had insisted on doing up the pickles and jams and leaving her home "spectable," as she called it. The delay was very trying to the younger woman, but the amount of work to be done before Madge would move, helped as a sedative to Linda's highly-strung nerves. At last, after many weeks delay, and with autumn passing into winter, they found themselves, tired and stiff with the long journey, riding in the mail stage towards Athabasca Landing.

Madge was weary and cross, and had, very shortly after the commencement of their long journey, never ceased to bewail her absence from home and express her voluble ideas at all times in regard to "anyone being so selfish as to take sick up in these outlandish parts." Her sister, meanwhile, listened to her diatribes in silence, wrapped up in her own thoughts and picturing a man lying on a bed of pain, calling for *Her*.

The air grew colder and colder as the drive proceeded, and both women shivered in their inactivity. For about the tenth time, Mrs. Gettling tartly asked the driver how much longer the sight-seeing tour was going to last. The driver turned round surlily but caught the expression in the younger girl's eyes and smiled instead.

"Bless you, Ma'am, you'll soon be there now, in

fact we should see the city round the next turning, and you'll be mighty glad you've made the journey when you find yourself all comfy in a first-class hotel. The pity of it is that the river, which is the main attraction I allow, has discarded her summer clothes and is fast putting on her icy garments. But you mustn't be prejudiced by that, you'll get all kinds of amusements, skating and tobogganing in a few days. See, the snow has started right now."

Mrs. Gettling blazed. "I did not come up here for amusement I'll have you know. The idea of suggesting tobogganing to me! I've come up to put matters right in a certain direction."

The driver looked at her curiously.

"Believe me, Ma'am, I'm sure you'll succeed too. Now I come to look at you closer, I can see you ain't the kind of lady to go gadding about at winter resorts—not of course that the Landing claims to be one," he added. "But, cheer up, Ma'am, we're nearly there. You'll see the lights of the famous city just now. I expect the tourist's guide has gone off duty for the day, but I reckon that won't jar you much to-night. Here we are. Down this little slope and we brings up smartly at the hotel."

The passengers did not quite agree with his idea of a "little slope." It required the efforts of brakes and constant "steady" to take them down the steep hill, but eventually, with a sigh of relief, they were deposited at the hotel.

The description of the "city" and the hotel as given by their loquacious driver, did not seem to harmonise with their surroundings, and although Linda had sensed that he had been jollying them, yet her sister had accepted his statements as fact. It was therefore

quite a shock to her to be faced with the proposition of staying in the building which confronted them with a gang of rough-looking men who had come out to see the arrival of the stage; but if there were a chance of warmth and food, she must accept the inevitable and face the curious crowd. She seized Linda's arm.

"Let's get in as soon as possible and tell the man to bring up the baggage."

But the baggage had already been deposited on the verandah, the stage had driven off before they had time to move; and now they were left, two women, among a crowd of interested men.

Linda felt the colour flaming in her cheeks, but she spoke bravely to her sister.

"Let's go in and get a room, and perhaps someone will bring our baggage in for us."

"That will never do, Linda," retorted Madge, "why, they might be stolen in this outlandish place."

"Well, let's chance it, Madge, we can't stand here and freeze."

As she spoke a Corporal of the R.N.W.M.P. detached himself from the crowd and came over to them.

"Anything I can do, ladies?" he asked.

Linda smiled gratefully at him. "Yes, we are staying the night here and want our baggage taken in, but the stage driver drove off before we could ask him."

"Yes, old George reckons he's filled his contract when he's unloaded here," the Corporal replied smiling; "but go inside out of the cold and I'll see your baggage is taken in alright. Are you contemplating stopping here long?"

Mrs. Gettling stiffened immediately, but her sister patted her arm.

"No, we hope to go up river to-morrow as far as Grouard."

The man whistled softly, "Impossible," he exclaimed, "the ice is not safe yet, and no one will be going up for days. Then it will be a question of getting a lift with some freighting party or the mail carrier."

The two women looked at one another helplessly.

"You had better go in and talk it over with the hotel manager, maybe he can help you. I'm going up to Grouard as soon as the ice holds, but my sleigh will only take two, otherwise I would offer you a lift."

Mrs. Gettling bowed stiffly.

"Thank you, we will go in and make our own arrangements if you will see to the baggage."

The man flushed at her speech, but seeing the look on the younger woman's face, he smiled quietly and went over to the baggage. As the sisters entered the rotunda they could hear him calling for someone to take their effects inside, and while they were going through the process of registering, their baggage was dumped at their feet.

They found on enquiring that the Corporal had told them correctly regarding further progress up country, and they retired to their bedroom completely at a loss what to do. The half-finished walls at once caught Madge's eye.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "we can't undress in here. Why anyone could easily look over the top of the boards all around. It isn't decent."

"Well, dear," replied her sister, laughing in spite of her weariness and the strangeness of their surroundings, "we can blow the lamp out before we start to get ready for bed. But, you dear old goose,

there's no one upstairs now; it is too early for the others to go to bed. Anyhow it is nice to be indoors and that bed looks very inviting to me. Let's get to sleep as soon as we can and forget our troubles until to-morrow."

The light was soon out, and, in the dark, the sisters scrambled into bed, being soon lost in sleep after their long drive.

The morning broke on a white world. The snow, which had been falling steadily all night, had covered everything with a white blanket. Linda was up and full of life and eagerness, but her sister was feeling the effects of her long journey and lay in bed groaning.

It was a wearying time that the younger girl spent during the next few days. Madge either could not, or would not, get up, and Linda had to wait on her and endeavour to pass the time by enquiring about the next part of the journey, and with occasional chats to the Corporal.

At last word came that the ice on the river was safe for transportation, and Linda heard that freighters had already started for up-country. The mail left that same day and in desperation she again sought the Corporal. His reply to her questioning was not reassuring. On her behalf he made inquiries and found there was no one going up river for many days with the exception of himself and he was going to start on the next day, but as he had already told her, his sleigh could only accommodate two.

Thoroughly downcast, Linda returned to her sister and reported the news.

"Well, I'm not sorry, Linda," said Madge, "for I don't intend to stir any further until we can go up respectably in a steamer!"

Linda started. "But that will not be until Spring comes," she cried.

"Maybe, but it's sheer foolhardiness going up into that lone country in this weather and I'll not think of it."

"Oh, but I can't stay here!" came the tearful retort.

"Well, you can't do anything else, as far as I can see. It was madness for us to come anyway, but, there—you would, and see where you have landed us. Whatever will Gerald do I don't know, and my hens too!"

Linda stood in deep thought for some time, and then, with a deep-dyed blush, she again left the room.

She found the Corporal making his final arrangements for departure and begged a word with him. The man noticed her heightened colour and watched her closely.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, gently.

"No—oh, yes, I mean. It's just like this, Corporal—I don't know your name."

"Mabson," he put in.

"Well, Mr. Mabson, my sister is all right now, but she absolutely refuses to go any further up west until the boat goes again."

"But that won't be till Spring!" he exclaimed.

"I know, and I must get to Grouard!" The colour ebbed and flowed in her cheeks. "You come from Grouard, don't you?" she added quickly, "do you know a man up there who has broken his leg?"

"Yes, a fellow by the name of Colethorpe, he's up at the Barracks. Say, is he the magnet for you, Miss?"



The girl hung her head. "Yes," she said softly, "I'm engaged to him and I must get to him somehow."

She clutched the Corporal's arm. "Could you,—would you—let me come with you in your sleigh?"

The Corporal started. "Say," he said shortly, "you're a plucky one. That chap must have been balmy to have left you behind! But I can't, Miss. It's a hard trip and besides there isn't much accommodation for a young lady like you. I think your sister's right."

He smiled and turned away, and the girl slowly wended her way upstairs to bed. Sleep, however, would not come to her, and she lay restlessly listening to the steady breathing of Madge for many an hour, until nature made its call on her and she fell into a doze to awake with the sun glaring on the snowy whiteness outside.

She glanced at her watch. It was eight o'clock. With a sudden inspiration she looked at Madge who was still sleeping soundly. Then she got out of bed quietly, dressed hurriedly, repacked her bag, wrote a note to Madge, and slipped noiselessly out of the room.

Her heart was thumping. What if she were too late! She reached the rotunda, and, through the swing doors, she saw the Corporal having breakfast.

With heaving breast she entered and ordered food, and as she ate it quickly, she kept her eye on the Corporal. As he got up from the table she rose too and followed him out.

"Good morning, Miss Faunch," he said. "Why so early?"

"Good morning, Mr. Mabson," she said smiling, "I'm going on a long journey."

"Oh, have you found someone to take you, after all?"

"Yes."

"Where's your sister, Mrs. Gettling?"

"Oh, she is not coming with me. You see there's only room for one passenger in the conveyance in which I'm going."

The Corporal looked surprised. "May I see you aboard?" he said, picking up her bag. They went outside where only the Corporal's sleigh stood waiting.

"I don't see any conveyance for you, Miss Faunch; were they to pick you up here?"

"Yes," she said, trying to look disappointed as she went near the sleigh.

The Corporal hesitated, then "Jump in, and we'll see if we can see them up street."

"Oh, thank you," she exclaimed, as she tucked the rug round her. "You needn't trouble to go up street; my conveyance has come."

The man dropped the reins and stared at her.

"Hadn't we better be starting?" she said, looking up at him sweetly. "I'm so afraid my sister will want to come too."

"No, we can't possibly do with her," he exclaimed. "But is everything all right? Had you bargained on going with me all along?"

She nodded as the laughter shone in her eyes.

The mountie whipped up the horses and turned to her eagerly.

"Well, bless me, if I'd anyone who'd show their affection for me like that, I'd leave the Force!"

## CHAPTER XXI

THE horses trotted along briskly over the snow-covered ice, following the trail which had already been blazed by travellers who had preceded them. The air was clear and crisp. Trees cracked here and there and unseen animals dashed through the undergrowth which lined the banks of the river on which they drove.

Linda was still excited. Her bold plan had worked successfully so far, but now she was thinking of Madge and wondering what she would do when she awoke and found her note. Yet Madge could not feel the tugging at the heart which she was experiencing. Vance had left her under a cloud of misunderstanding and now he was calling for her. It was that which goaded her to take the only way of escape out of her dilemma.

She wondered what the Corporal thought of her, and if he were very cross. Stealing a look at him she found to her relief he was whistling softly and evidently oblivious of her presence. Then she sneezed. At once he was all attention.

"Getting cold, Miss Faunch?" he interrogated, turning eagerly on her.

"No, thanks, I am far from that. In fact, Mr. Mabson, my unseemly conduct will cause me to glow for some time to come." The flush again rose to her cheeks.

"Well, I can't say I blame you; only, as I said before, it's not a trip for a lady to undertake unless she has to——"

"Very good then, Mr. Mabson, that fits me for I simply have to get to Grouard!"

"Lord!" he muttered and looked straight ahead.

"Don't you smoke?" she said after another silence.

Her companion smiled. "I reckon there are mighty few men who have lived up here who don't do that. Why, it's companionship, and oftentimes it wards off the pangs of hunger too."

"If you like to fill your pipe I can drive for a while."

"I shouldn't think of smoking with a lady at my side, thank you."

The girl laughed and reached for the lines. "Go on and fill your pipe and enjoy yourself. The modern woman not only allows smoking in her presence but a lot of them even indulge in it themselves. I haven't started yet, but if, as you say, it wards off the pangs of hunger I shall have to do so very shortly. This air is certainly good for anyone with dyspepsia."

The air rang with laughter as the smoke curled up from the Corporal's pipe.

"Our first stopping-place is not very far off and then you shall see what a really domesticated person I am," he said joyously.

"Oh no, that would not be fair," she retorted. "You are the groom and I am the cook."

Their laughter rang again over the frozen river.

"Isn't it quiet up here," he broke in soberly. "It will be, too, from now on until Spring opens up. It

seems to me as if Nature accepts the coming of snow and frost as a time for relaxation after her strenuous activity all the Spring and Summer months."

"You like the life up here then, Mr Mabson?"

"Absolutely. I would never live shut up in the cities any more. Funny thing, too, anyone who once tastes this kind of life doesn't want to go back to the monotony of the old."

Linda started. "Are all people affected that way who come up here?" she put in eagerly.

"Practically all," was the nonchalant reply. "You see there's a freedom up here not obtainable in more settled parts. As long as a person keeps himself or herself respectable and law-abiding, they can enjoy unlimited freedom."

"But how careless they must become," ejaculated his companion.

"No. Somehow the character comes out and keeps them straight, and in addition we have parsons even up in these parts. Good fellows too. Men I respect. They seem to feel the call of the Great West like other men."

"Or perhaps it is the call of something deeper," she said softly.

"Whatever it is," he replied, "it's something which goads or urges us all on and holds us there!"

"And do you think I shall get that way too, Mr. Mabson?"

Her companion leant forward and looked at her intently.

"I'm quite sure of it," came the quiet response.

"But what about Mrs. Gettling?"

"Oh, she hasn't come far enough, and besides, her

thoughts are already centred on her husband and home. Are you really hungry?"

"I could eat anything, I believe, without hesitation or question," she responded quickly.

They laughed together just like old friends.

"Very well. Where you see that smoke, that means lunch. We shall have to cook it ourselves but hunger's a good sauce and anything will taste good."

"That's a very backhanded compliment to the cook," she laughingly retorted.

The sleigh pulled up at a cabin set at a little distance from a log shack, out of the lone chimney of which was pouring the smoke they had seen. Linda Faunch stepped down from the sleigh, cramped and stiff, and entered the cabin.

"Why, there's no one here!" she exclaimed.

"No, this is a stopping-place. There are several right along the lake trail from twenty to twenty-five miles apart. They're for the convenience of travellers. The only absolute regulations—law you may say—is to leave sufficient dry fuel for the next comer and a bucket ready for water. And here they are. If you light the fire I'll fetch the water and we'll soon have lunch under way."

With a laugh at her strange experiences she set to work to light a fire, and the man soon returned with a pailful of icy water.

"Now I've got to go and see to the team, Miss Faunch, so if you can get things started, or if you want to titivate yourself a bit you'll have the opportunity. I shall be gone exactly ten minutes."

She could sense he was doing all he could to look after her comfort and she was grateful to him for his consideration. She repeated his words "I shall be

gone exactly ten minutes." It gave her an opportunity to be by herself and at the same time took away any fear of nervousness owing to his absence. If this were the way the Great West brought out Character she was going to like it immensely, and as she "titivated herself" as the Corporal called it, she could feel even now the call of the West tugging within her.

Ten minutes to the dot she heard the Corporal whistling on his return, and he opened the door sniffing like a hungry dog.

"Everything seems to be going fine," he exclaimed, "and I've joined your ranks; I'm as hungry as a hound."

The meal passed quickly. The dishes were washed and stowed away again in the sleigh, the wood replenished by the Corporal, who then went after the horses.

"Shall be back in five minutes," he sang out, and she smiled again at his thoughtfulness.

In exactly the prescribed time he reappeared leading the team and hitched them quickly to the sleigh. She was standing ready and jumped in at his bidding.

"How precise you are!" she said jokingly.

"Yes, I suppose it's the training we get in the Force," he replied, taking her remark seriously. "When we give a time, we have to keep to it if humanly possible."

The conversation swung round on various topics and the miles sped away.

Linda's companion was a storehouse of information. He pointed out little touches of beauty and objects of interest from time to time, until the sun

sank slowly from sight. The growing darkness brought fresh fears to her. Where were they going to spend the night? Somehow she felt perfectly safe with this newly-found friend, yet her ideas of decorum and propriety kept forcing themselves uppermost.

Her companion caught her glancing round at the oncoming darkness and seemed to read her thoughts, for he broke off in the midst of telling her about the many wrecks on the rapids, and said quite solicitously: "I don't want to stop at this next stopping-place where I usually make for; there's a better one a little further, with plenty of hay to sleep on, and a private room for women travellers. It isn't used much as you can imagine. Women don't travel often up here in the winter time."

Again she felt grateful to this gentleman in His Majesty's uniform.

"Thank you very much," she said simply. "I'm not tired." But she could feel the warmth of her prosaic remark.

At last he pulled towards the shore, and again she could dimly distinguish a cabin very similar to the one in which they had lunched. Here, too, was an inviting pile of wood, and she immediately started the fire, while the Corporal went for the water, after lighting a lamp which he hung from the ceiling. Coming back he set down the pail, and smiling at her, he announced his intention of again being absent for ten minutes.

While thus alone she took the opportunity of looking round the cabin and found a corner roughly boarded off, and saw with relief, a heavy door, on the inside of which was a stout bolt. The chivalrous



action of her companion in bringing her to this particular cabin with its added comfort, moved her considerably, and it was her singing which he heard on his return at the allotted time.

After the meal was over and the dishes done, they sat round the fire on the rude benches, and she dozed in comfort while the Corporal smoked and told her some of his experiences.

At nine o'clock he jumped to his feet. "Here I am forgetting all about how tired you must be," he exclaimed. "Come, it's bedtime. Your bedroom, rough as it is, is in there," pointing, as he spoke to the space behind the partition. "I shall sleep by the fire and keep it going. But first of all I must go out and see to the horses, and shall be gone for fifteen minutes. I hope I shan't awaken or frighten you on my return. There's nothing like a long ride in the cold, followed by a bed of hay to make one sleep. Don't forget to bolt your bedroom door. Good-night!"

"Good-night," she said gratefully, "and thank you for all your kindness."

He took up another lantern, lit it and went out, and she entered her unique bedroom (where there was no furniture of any description, only piled up hay), bolted the door, and, before the Corporal returned, was fast asleep. Once during the night she awakened and heard him piling more wood on the fire, but she merely turned over and fell again into a dreamless sleep.

Very early she heard the Corporal knocking at her door, apologizing for disturbing her but saying it was time to get up. She looked at her watch in the dim light of the still-burning lantern and found it was

three o'clock! "Surely there was some mistake," she suggested, but no, he was adamant; they must be ready to start again at four o'clock, if they wished to have lunch at the next stopping place; and now, he declared, he was going out to feed the horses.

Ugh! it was cold; but owing to his thoughtfulness she was able to slip out and dress by the blazing fire, and had breakfast well under way on his return.

That day and the next were replicas of the preceding one, save that they passed the steamer (which in summer time plied between Grouard and the end of the lake), abandoned for the winter and stuck fast in the ice, close to shore. Linda found herself getting used to the hard travelling, and by the time they reached Grouard she felt able to stand a day's journey without effort. They pulled off the lake; passed Revillon's store and halted by the Post-Office.

"I want to go and see if there's any mail, Miss Faunch. Do you mind waiting?"

"Not at all, Mr. Mabson. I'll get out and exercise to get rid of the cramp, while you are inside."

The door closed on the Corporal and she walked up and down outside, busying herself looking round that part of the settlement. Another sleigh was waiting at the Post Office door and she recognised it as the mail stage from the Landing. Somehow she did not envy the driver his cold journey back there.

Suddenly she halted. A man with a limp was coming down the trail towards her and he was strangely familiar. She was agitated and did not notice the presence of a very unsavoury-looking individual, evidently under the influence of liquor,

who had come out of a nearby house. The lame figure came nearer and she knew it was Vance!

All her womanly tenderness swelled up in her as she saw his haggard face and that limp, and she went forward to meet him eagerly. Oblivious to everyone else they had tongue and ears only for each other, until they were rudely awakened to their surroundings by the burly voice of the intoxicated man.

"Ho, ho, got another wench have you my gallant rescuer? Well, if you aren't a regular lady killer, I'll eat my hat."

They turned away from him, but he was persistent. The sight of the man who had caused him to lose his job, getting all the leading part in the society of women, was too much for him.

"Say, Miss, don't take any stock in what *he* says," he roared.

"What do you mean?" Linda said, disengaging herself from Vance as the words of the Corporal sang in her ears "The West brings out the real character."

"Well, I reckon he'll fall for anything in a skirt. He was struck on a breed girl the last time I saw him and he lost me my job as Captain of that steamer you passed, for doing it."

A little crowd had collected; here was something new for that shut-in village. The mail-driver came out staggering with his load which he deposited on his sleigh and stood listening to the Captain's outburst.

Vance was silent. Would the girl for whom he had been waiting all these months believe this man's charge? No, he must make his position clear right away. His full vim had not returned and this was hard on his slowly returning strength, but he turned on the ex-Captain with all the vigour he possessed.

"You contemptible rat! How dare you stand there and lie like that! You know why you were fired from your job."

"Yes, and you know you were chumming with that breed girl," heatedly retorted the soak, "and it was through that I got fired."

The Corporal came out of the Post Office at that moment and Linda addressed herself to him.

"Please, Corporal Mabson, do you know if there's any truth in what this man says? He claims that Vance—Mr. Colethorpe, through getting mixed up somehow with a breed girl, lost him his job as captain of that steamer we passed. Is it true?"

The Corporal looked at her and the others, and then said, "I heard something to that effect, but——"

"Thank you," she said shortly. Then going to the mail-driver, who was already seated in his sleigh preparatory to starting, she said in a passionless tone: "I see you have room for a passenger and I wish to come with you to the Landing."

Nonchalantly she lifted her grip out of the Corporal's sleigh and deposited it in the mail stage. Then she jumped in and drove off with the mail carrier.

Vance looked at her spellbound. Then the Corporal touched his arm reassuringly. "Better get in and ride back with me," he said gently. "You can't do anything with them when they take the bit in their teeth. Worse than bolting cayuses."

Vance obeyed as if in a dream and drove off with the Corporal to the Barracks. He ate supper in silence, and the Doctor shot a searching glance at him again and again until he left the room.

"He looks bad, Sergeant," he muttered as soon as they were alone. "What's happened? He's not nearly so well to-night as he has been."

"Can't make it out, Doc.," came the reply. "He went down to the village for a walk and I suppose he overdid it."

"Well, Sergeant, he must not be allowed to attempt much exercise yet, he's not strong enough."

The pipes were lit and talk ran along ordinary everyday topics. The mail had brought a fine lot of papers to be read at leisure during the next fortnight, which would open up fresh fields for discussion.

Then the front door opened and closed and Irish swung into the room. He was cheerful and apparently in the best of health.

"Hullo, everyone. Can I stay here for the night, Serg.? I've come for supplies."

The Sergeant nodded.

"Thanks. Say, what's got into Vance? The last time I saw him he was at the Crossing. Now's he's in an awful state. I saw him as I came in. Told me he had to making the Landing right away. Hark, there he goes if I'm not mistaken."

The Sergeant and the Doctor both jumped to their feet.

"Quick! Stop him, Irish. He's not fit to travel. He must be crazy!"

"Crazy? That's not what I thought of him in the past. No, Serg., he was a strong character, but a bit of a mule."

"But, my boy," burst in the Doctor, "since you saw him he has had a compound fracture of the tibia and is still very weak. Something's upset him, we don't know what." He turned on the mountie,

"Say, Sergeant, the Corporal brought him home, why not ask him if he knows anything concerning the matter?"

The Sergeant rang, and Corporal Mabson came at once in answer to the summons.

"Where did you pick Mr. Colethorpe up, Corporal?"

"Outside the Post Office, sir."

"Was there anything peculiar in the circumstances?"

"Yes. A young lady by the name of Faunch who'd just come up with me was talking to him when the Captain butted in and hold her his story. She seemed to believe it, and went back on the mail stage which was just pulling out for the Landing."

"Whew!" ejaculated the Doctor. "That must have been the girl I wrote to for him, and she's turned him down on hearing the Captain's lies!"

"That's just where Vance has gone," exclaimed Irish.

"He'll never make it in his condition," retorted the Doctor, "He's going to his death!"

Irish pulled out his watch. "He's only got about twenty minutes start of me. He has the team from the Barracks and I've only my single horse, but I'll reach him!"

He picked up his hat and rushed out; jumped into his sleigh and slashed his astonished horse vigorously, until it broke into a gallop.

"Batty!" he murmured, "and ill. But, by George, he saved my life and this is where I get quits."

## CHAPTER XXII

LINDA sat like a stone as mile after mile put her further away from Grouard and that horrible scene with all those men standing round and staring at her. Oh, for Madge now! Why, oh why had she not listened to her sane advice and stayed at the Landing with her. Dear old Madge, leaving Gerald and her home in order to come with her, and then being abruptly left behind in that strange, wretched little place! She must get back to Madge.

Why do horses go so slowly, she thought. What a mad-brain scheme she had had, and now all her dreams had been ruthlessly shattered by a coarse speech from a drunken man, and Vance—she winced as she thought of his name—had said nothing!

She fell into a stupor, occasioned by overwrought nerves and over-tiredness. Then her busy mind started on the treadmill of memory again. Supposing Vance had really been faithful and that horrid man had not said anything. What would she have done anyway? Where could she have gone? Apparently there was no hotel, and besides she could not very well stay there alone. How silly she had been; how impulsive. She gulped back a sob, and at once the driver awoke from a reverie.

"Ain't no good, Miss, to carry on about a feller. They ain't worth it. Anyway," he added with a chuckle, "there's plenty of other fish in the matrimonial sea. If yer takes my advice yer'll pull yerself

together and keep yer wits about yer. It's going to be a dirty night and I ortn't to 'ave taken you with me, but bless my old w'iskers I was never so transfixed, no never."

She gave no answer to the loquacious driver and silence reigned once more.

The wind increased in velocity, whipping the snow into little particles which stung the face. It was pitch dark, and she shivered as she clung to the uncomfortable seat. When would they stop! The thought of the previous night and her chivalrous companion, as compared with the present driver who seemed of different fibre, added to her horror of the night which was rapidly approaching. Her thoughts were again interrupted by the driver.

"Reckon we can't make that further stopping-place to-night, Miss. It's a pity, as that's the one with a woman's room in it. Any'ow it ain't my fault."

He felt her shudder.

"The 'orses won't face this 'ere blizzard and I don't blame 'em. This job ain't what it's cracked up to be, and mighty poor pay for such nights as this. Get up there! Gosh darn it, ain't it a corker of a night!"

To Linda it seemed as if the storm was at its very height, and in her present nervous condition she read it as a judgment against her. Trees groaned, and the wind howled all around. Twice she heard the driver speaking to her and seemed unable to answer him. Then she felt the sleigh stop and a rough hand shook her violently.

"Don't go to sleep there, Miss! 'Ere's the old steamer. We'll get aboard 'er. There's a good



shelter for us and the team too. 'Ere, Miss, wake up!"

Linda felt herself roughly shaken and dragged out from the sleigh. She tottered on her feet, and was grateful for the strong support of the driver. A gang-plank was propped against the side of the vessel, and with the man's help she reached the deck and went inside. It was pitch dark everywhere and, under cover, there was a horrible smell of horses and varied cargo. Still she was grateful to be out of that fierce wind. She sank down on a near-by bench, and presently she heard the horses coming on board, led by the driver bearing a lantern and her bag. With precision he hung the lantern on a nail, dropped her bag at her feet and led the horses into vacant stalls. Out he went again and came staggering back with a hamper, which he carried into the kitchen parlour and dumped on the table.

"If yer'll get busy and rustle us a bite to eat, Miss; we'll both feel better. I've got to feed the 'orses and get some water now. Reckon I've got to cut a 'ole in the blooming ice. 'Ere's another lantern. Come in, Miss. I'll light the stove and then leave yer. One thing, we shall be snug to-night, with cabin berths to sleep in."

Linda realised that here was a rough diamond, and, taking fresh hold of herself, was soon busy getting supper out of the stores the old man had brought in. She had the table set and everything ready except for a hot drink, when he came back puffing, with a bundle of hay and a bucket of water.

Dropping the hay at the entrance he poured out a little water into the kettle and then took the rest to his horses. Linda smiled as she pictured the horses

drinking out of that bucket and of their having to use it again and again. She was experiencing the crude ways of a new country.

The meal finished and the dishes washed, she felt a yearning for bed and sought one of the cabins, where she was soon in the land of slumber.

Meanwhile a drama was being enacted on that wind-swept icy stretch.

Irish had driven hard, but, so far, had not been able to locate and overtake Vance. His horse, unused to the pace set by his master on this occasion, was showing signs of fatigue; indeed, Irish himself was feeling the effects of the strain and the intense cold, the stinging, pulverised snow and the cruel wind; but he grimly hung on, resolving to reach Vance before it was too late. The Doctor's words re-echoed in his brain.

He tried to light his pipe again and again, but the tempest derisively blew the feeble match flame out at each attempt. Then he recalled his own experience around a year ago when he had been lost in a blizzard, and Vance, unknown to him then, had rescued him. Now the tables were turned, and he wondered if he would ever catch up with his former rescuer, or if, through his horse playing out, he would give up his life in the endeavour. His mind was unusually active. Thoughts travelled back over the icy waste to his present happy home and his wife, and he wondered how she was faring, and if the expected had happened and who was with her.

Then he took to thinking of the girl to whom Vance had been talking. He could not imagine how she had come so far as she had, and then gone away again in that abrupt manner. Surely no girl would

listen to a beastly sot like the ex-Captain! Or had he been cunning enough, in spite of his befuddled brain, to present the case so darkly against Vance and in such a manner, too, that Vance could not explain except at much length. Drat the girl anyway! Was she shallow, or emotional, or too strait-laced? If ever he got Vance out of this, and could get the girl by himself, she would undergo a fierce half-hour's tongue whipping, even if she had been kind to him in the past.

He felt himself sinking into that deadly dozing which is fatal, and roused himself and the horse to renewed effort. He had come miles; how far he did not know, but anyway they must be nearing a stopping-place. The thought brought a question to his mind. Should he stop and rest both his horse and himself, or should he push on in his search for Vance?

As he turned over the problem he was conscious of deathly lassitude creeping over him, and he realised the cold was calling him to a sleep of death. Standing up he whipped his tired horse to a gallop and reached a slowly-moving sleigh on the trail ahead, stopping the team by shouting lustily. Then he saw the reason of their faltering walk.

From the head of the near horse hung an out-stretched arm and a body was being dragged along the beaten snow.

"Good God," he muttered, "grant that I'm in time!"

With a great effort he lifted the inanimate form and disengaged the hand which had become entangled in the rein. Then stumbling with his burden to the sleigh, covered it with the rugs, caught

up the lines and lashed the horses into a gallop, his own horse and sleigh following at a leisurely pace behind.

He dare not stop to attend to Vance. He must get him into shelter without delay. But how far shelter was away he had no idea.

A light moved some little distance ahead, and he made for that. It showed again and then entirely disappeared! But he kept the team on the gallop towards where, as near as he could judge, he had seen it, and, through the blinding blizzard, swept madly on.

Suddenly a dark mass loomed before him, and he saw it was the steamer in her winter bed. Here was shelter anyway for both men and beasts.

He halted the team and swinging down, looked for a place to get aboard, finding to his satisfaction a gang-plank. Staggering against the tempest, he grasped Vance firmly, flung him over his shoulder, and, with gasping breath and tottering steps, went aboard and inside the familiar, covered, deck.

A lamp was burning. Surprised and exhausted, he called with the full force of the remaining strength in his lungs. At the sound of his voice the mail-driver stepped from a cabin and stared at him in astonishment.

"Help me here," he exclaimed as he laid Vance on the kitchen-parlour floor. "He's in a bad way. Got any liquor with you?"

"You bet!" came the reassuring answer. "And by the looks of 'im 'e needs it worse than I do. Beastly night, ain't it!"

"Where's the girl?" demanded Irish, after getting some of the fiery potion down Vance's throat.

"In 'er cabin, fast asleep I reckon."

"Drat her fiery temper or whatever ails her. She's responsible for this. She turned him down cold, so I hear, then made tracks with you and he tried to follow, weak as he is. I found him away back being dragged along by the near horse; evidently he's felt cold and got out to lead the team, when his strength gave out. In falling his wrist must have caught somehow, and the hanging weight checked the pace of the creatures, though the cold kept them moving no doubt. I'm mighty glad to see you, pard, I couldn't have gone much farther myself, but I had to get Vance Colëthorpe into safety, if I died in the effort."

"Well, yer sure are a real man yerself. Let's get 'im into a berth and comfy-like and mebbe 'e'll come round, and in the meantime yer must 'ave summat to warm yer. Lucky I always carried some stuff with me; I've no use for these pesky regulations what prohibits a feller from carrying it for proper use. Those oo're strict against it ort to be shipped up 'ere for a winter's course in right and sane thinking, and be twenty-odd miles from shelter on a night like this. I reckon as they'd be glad of some, and the good Lord wouldn't charge it agin 'em either."

They carried the still unconscious Vance into a cabin, took off his icy garments and tucked him up between blankets. Then they gave him another glass of liquor and left him. They could do no more at that time and the horses below were needing attention.

Irish had a bracer to warm himself, and, by the time they reached the ice below, his horse had come up, so they unhitched all three, led them on board

in the shelter of the covered deck, fed and watered them, and then sat down with their pipes to discuss the situation.

"Rummy go, ain't it!" ejaculated the mail-driver after a while. "I suppose that feller won't be fit to travel for a tidy space, will 'e?"

Irish shook his head.

"Well, we ain't got much grub and I've got to make the Landing. What's to be done? I can't leave yer with nothing to eat."

The men sat in silence until the driver had an idea.

"I suggest I push on to-morrow by myself, taking enough for a meal and make Drake's place to-morrow night if I can. 'Is 'ouse is by the stopping-place, yer know. Drake will see me through all right. Then I can bring eats for all of yer back on my return."

"How long will that be?" grimly asked Irish.

"Five days at most, I reckon, but I'll 'ustle and make it sooner if I can."

"And in the meantime, Vance will have no medical attention, and the three of us will have to subsist on the remains of your grub-stake. It isn't a pleasant outlook."

"But there ain't any other way out is there? Besides you'll 'ave the girl to 'elp yer nurse 'im."

"Yes, if she only plays the game we could get the Doc. here, and by gad I'll get him here somehow. You needn't worry about that part. As for the girl, bah! I can't make head nor tails of her."

"Nor me either," said the driver knocking his pipe out. "Let's turn in; we've both 'ad a 'ard drive and I'm due for an early start."

## CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN Linda came out of her cabin next morning, she had several surprises awaiting her. First she found that the mail-driver had gone without her; next she came face to face with Irish (of all persons!), and she recalled their last meeting and his show of affection. Now, however, he was different, entirely changed in fact!

"You here!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, thanks to you," he retorted.

"Thanks to me? Why, I don't understand."

"No, there's mighty little you could understand, I'm thinking."

Anger took possession of her.

"How dare you speak to me like that. Where is the mail-driver?"

"He's gone some hours ago, and I'm depending on him to save our lives."

"Our lives, why . . . ."

"Yes, yours and mine and Vance Colethorpe's."

"Vance Colethorpe's! Is he here, here in this steamer? Why, I left him . . . ."

"Yes, you left him. Left him cold, I understand. But he's made of sterner stuff than that and, weak and unfit to travel though he was, he started off to overtake you, to make you see what a damned little fool you are!"

She started from him with blazing eyes.

"How dare you talk to me like that. Perhaps

you do not realize that I had complete evidence that Vance—Mr. Colethorpe—had been entangling himself with a wretched half-breed girl, and I wasn't taking second choice from him or anyone!"

Irish gripped her wrist with a force which made her cry out. "If I were your brother I'd shake some horse-sense into you, you shallow, strait-laced brat. Vance is a damned sight too good for you. Why, I was with him when he stood by that girl on this very boat, and I'll have you know *she's my wife!*"

The full purport of the words stung her, and she retreated before his outburst, endeavouring to make for her cabin, but in her agitation put her hand on the door of the one in which Vance was lying. With a bound Irish was by her and grabbed her arm again, mercilessly flinging her aside.

"No, you don't," he hissed. "You aren't taking your hysterical business and forgive-me-dear stuff into his room. You've done all the harm to him you can, I reckon, and he's too good for the likes of you. Stand back and keep back from his door or I'll forget you're a girl and thrash you as you deserve." His blazing eyes added conviction to his utterance.

Her hysteria had passed and given place to anger too, but she was held by his renewed outburst.

"He's white, white right through; we've found that out up here. Character always shows. Yet you took that damned rat's word against his!" His fists opened and shut convulsively as he spoke.

His loyalty to his friend swept away her anger.

"What can I do?" she murmured. "I didn't know and besides I was but a girl among all those men."



"Yes, and you had to put him in wrong with all those fellows. No man with any decent make-up in him could stand that, and when he had fully realized your action, he just naturally had to follow you, and make you take it back."

Linda clasped and unclasped her hands again and again in her distress, but the other went on unheeding.

"I came into town for supplies and left my wife, the girl you cursed, mind you, far from well, in fact the baby's due any time. But I had to go after Vance, and if I hadn't, he would never be alive this morning. Now get busy with some grub while I take a look at him. Why the hell you came West I'm hanged if I know."

The girl drew herself up with eyes sparkling. "I came because Vance wanted me, according to his letter. I may have been hasty, but I didn't know—oh, how can I prove I had to come, just had to come!"

Irish stared at her. Then he said less gruffly: "If that's what you really, deep-down, honestly feel without gushy stuff, well, I reckon you can learn your lesson yet. Get busy with breakfast." Then he went in to Vance.

After a little while he came out and his face was very grave. The girl saw his expression and clutched at the table. "How is he; is he conscious; will he live?"

"I don't know." Then he sank on to a form and silently drank the waiting tea.

"How's the grub holding out?" he asked later.

"There's not much left," she said mournfully, "but I don't want any."

"You needn't act the heroic here," he retorted.

"I don't want a sick fool on my hands besides a really ill white man. You eat."

Another silence during which she obeyed orders.

"Something's got to be done and done quick, I reckon. Our grub's running low; won't last until the mail returns. Vance's chance lies in a doctor's attention right smart and he's no nearer than the Barracks at Grouard . . . and then . . . there's my little Mimi."

He stood up and then paced up and down restlessly.

"Great Heavens! If only you had not-treated him the way you did."

"Let me stay with him," she entreated, "and you go for food, the Doctor, and home to your wife."

"You stay with him! No! He's worthy of a white girl's love and when I say 'white,' I don't refer to her skin. I stay with him and we'll get through somehow, please God! If only we were at the priest's house at Peace River Crossing, he'd bring him round. He has the right medicine to heal any mind and that's the matter with Vance right now!"

"Oh, but you don't understand. I realise I do love him. Do let me stay with him and you go."

"You, . . . Love? Say, you want to hear Father Henthlome, that's the priest at the Crossing, read to you about that. How does it go. Ah, yes. 'Love suffereth long and is kind; taketh not account of evil. Love never faileth.' Do you think you love Vance or anybody, except yourself? No! While I live, despite my Mimi, I stay with him. He gave me back my life once at least; well, if need be I can give it back again for him."

With her hands clenched and the nails unconsciously digging into the flesh, she faced him again

with a different look in her eyes as the great lesson of unselfishness sank deep into her soul, and she realized that before her was another example of Western character and strength.

"How fine you are!" she stammered. "Oh, let me show I've learnt my lesson and grasped the teaching of the West. Let me prove myself worthy of his love. Help me to start for Grouard to get food and the Doctor, and then I can go to your—your wife. Oh, someone will take me, wouldn't they!"

The man stared at her. "By George, I believe there's a chance for you after all. If you're in earnest, get ready and I'll help you start out."

She went to her cabin and came out shortly afterwards, ready for the journey, with her bag. Meanwhile Irish had harnessed his horse to his sleigh and stood waiting on the ice for her.

Linda came down the gangway, then stood and gazed back at the steamer, thinking of that which had urged her to come West and now lay personified in that silent cabin. She pulled herself together, took the lines from Irish and held out her hand to him.

"I'll send the Doctor and food as soon as I can and I'll reach Mimi too, God willing."

He took no notice of her hand, but gazed intently at her face as he said, "God help you to stand the goad and to catch the spirit of the West!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Mrs. Gettling had recovered somewhat from the effects of Linda's note, she carefully made her plans to be as comfortable as she could in the "queer little place," and resolved to act as an official Welcomer to all guests. In this she found her days passing quickly. At first the men (for there were few women in that place) placed an ulterior motive on her graciousness, but they soon found out their mistake, and, in their rough way, showed their appreciation of her motherly interest in them all. In fact, within a few days after Linda's departure, "Mother" Gettling had become part of the establishment in the hotel, and it was no uncommon sight to see her in animated conversation with a rough-looking individual, who after telling of all his recent adventures, oftentimes exaggerated, was being drawn out to speak of his mother and the old home.

Many a weak step toward the bar had been diverted to that Motherly Person with those appealing eyes, and, after a chat with her, the weakness had given place to strength and the trip to the bar was abandoned. This had naturally resulted in a falling off of business at the bar, for those who went in did not stay until they were incapable, but took care to leave in time to be presentable to Mother Gettling.

On one particular occasion a white-haired man

stood hesitating on the threshold of the bar but had ultimately accepted Mother's pleading eyes, and crossing over to where she sat, greeted her cordially. Then out the bartender came, seized with anger.

He spoke as he felt, but he acted unwisely. Mrs. Gettling had many friends in that rotunda, and before the white-haired man could rise from the seat beside her, the bartender was surrounded by an angry mob and severely mauled.

The noise grew in violence, and Mrs. Gettling was frightened beyond description, but her white-haired companion soothed her by saying he would "make the blighter apologise!"

The next minute he was gone and was pushing his way in the midst of the surging men. The bartender was angrily denying his intention of apologising to that interfering old hag, when his arm was seized in a vicelike grip by a white-haired man, and the twist (so familiar to schoolboys) made him bend his unwilling knees. The crowd roared and he struggled violently to arise, but was powerless.

"You'll come and kneel down nicely before that lady," came a voice from behind him, "and you'll apologise for being an utter blackguard."

Shouts of approval broke from the assemblage, which parted to enable the scene to be enacted. The bartender looked with venom on those around him and struggled to get free again when the twist was slightly eased to enable him to rise.

"Can you hold him, Dad?" sung out a brawny voice, "if not I will."

"You bet I can," rang back the response. "I've been waiting to get back on him for some time, the dirty beast."

The man was pushed and urged forward until he stood before the surprised Mrs. Gettling.

"Now say your piece and say it nicely, or else we'll put you through it."

"Is this the Bull they speak of in that bar notice?" said Mrs. Gettling, smiling sweetly. "It says to tie it outside."

A roar went through the crowd, then the white-haired man spoke.

"No, Ma'am, that's a different kind of specie, I reckon, to this skunk. He wishes to apologize to you, Ma'am. Now then, kneel before the lady and snap out your sorrow."

The bartender hesitated, then the arm-twist told and he sank down in front of Mrs. Gettling, the pain forcing him to speak.

"I'm sorry for what I said. Damn you."

"It's rather mixed, but I know he means well," she said, hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry. "I think that nasty stuff he sells makes him like that. Please let him go."

The bartender slunk away to the bar, and the white-haired man resumed his seat at Mother Gettling's side.

"Thank you very much," she whispered, "but I am sorry I was the cause of that outburst. I caught your eye as you were going into that horrid place..."

"And I'm glad you did, Ma'am. I've tried to keep my self-respect ever since it was given back to me by a young fellow in this very place. Want to hear about it?"

Mrs. Gettling was at once all attention and, as she listened to the story of the Good Samaritan in everyday life, her heart warmed to her companion

and his rescuer. "And did you find out his name?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes. He gave me a card with his name printed on it. I've got it in here in my pocket-book. He was some class, I knew it. Yes, here it is. Whenever, Ma'am, I gets the temptation to indulge in a little drink, I looks at that card and that makes me strong again."

Mrs. Gettling took the card and the name danced before her eyes, VANCE COLETHORPE.

Her agitation did not pass unnoticed to the man. "Do you know the name? It seems to have upset you, Ma'am."

"Yes, he's the man who has brought me here and whom my sister has gone up country to meet."

"Is your sister unmarried, Ma'am?"

She nodded a smiling affirmative.

"Well, if she's as nice as you are, she ought to marry him, but he's sure worthy of a fine mate. Hullo, here's the mail come in from Grouard, and I think, Ma'am, I must be getting ready for home. What's all the fuss about, I wonder?"

The mail-driver was the centre of attraction and he evidently brought news.

He had had a very eventful trip. There was a girl outside Grouard Post Office talking to a lame chap and she had left him abruptly and come back with the mail stage. Then owing to a blizzard . . . ("D'ye 'ave it 'ere?"—a chorus of "You bet, go on") they had to stay at the steamer, and during the night another fellow came on board carrying this lame fellow whom he had overtaken on the trail and found unconscious. The lame chap had evidently started to come after the girl. There were no further

details ready to his brain, and so he concluded dramatically,

"I left 'em there. Yer see I 'ad to bring the mail and get some grub to 'em. But there they be still, I reckon, in the steamer and grub running short."

A scream from Mrs. Gettling drew attention from the mail-driver to her.

"That's my sister, and the lame man is Vance Colethorpe; I must go to them. Oh, how can I get there!"

The white-haired man at her side perceptibly jumped.

"Say, you fellows," he yelled, "who'll help? That girl's Mother's sister, and the lame chap is the fellow who I told you all was so white to me. Mother wants to go to them at once. Who'll take her?"

"I will! I will!" came the response from all parts of the rotunda, but a great boyish-looking fellow pushed his way forward to Mrs. Gettling.

"Say, Mother, I'm at your service and very pleased I am to be so, Ma'am. We can start whenever you say the word. Just you get your things fixed up and I'll see about the grub. Don't you fret, Mother, we'll get there, and we'll go as fast as horseflesh can hoof it."

A cheer rang through the rotunda, and the tears started to Mrs. Gettling's eyes.

"Thank you very much indeed," she choked, "I'll be ready in ten minutes."

Such an animated scene on her departure to get ready was never witnessed in that "queer little place" before. Men crowded round the young fellow's sleigh, piling on goods of all description, until he was forced to stop further gifts. On Mother



Gettling's arrival she was helped by willing hands into the sleigh and warmly tucked in. Fresh horses had been forthcoming from somewhere and harnessed to the sleigh in which she sat, and with hats waving, and hearty cheers of "Good Luck," Mother Gettling started up-country in the Winter time after all!

The young fellow perceived her anxiety and awkwardly tried to reassure her. "Say, Mother," he exclaimed, "You made all of us back there at the Landing remember the good intentions we started out with, and the faith our Mothers had in us. Why not leave this matter in Higher Hands? I reckon your faith ain't dead!"

Mrs. Gettling cheered up at that, and kept her courage up during the tedious journey until, at last, her driver pointed out the steamer in the ice ahead.

Despite her self-control, Madge was shaking with excitement and anxiety as they drew up alongside the vessel. She jumped out and ran up the gang plank, and as she entered the kitchen-parlour, she came face to face with the man who had been rescued by Vance.

The surprise was a great shock to her and she sank upon a form near by. The man shook her hand warmly. "Mrs. Gettling, I expect? You may remember me. They call me 'Irish' up here. Thank God you've come! Vance is in the third cabin and the Police Doctor is with him. He says it's a case for good nursing, and now, with you here, he'll pull through alright."

"Where's my sister?" she asked quietly.

"Is she the one who nursed me back East?"

"Yes, yes. Where is she? The mail-driver said she was here!"

"There wasn't enough food for all three of us, and she drove back to Grouard in my sleigh to get the Doctor for Vance and—to find herself—"

"To find herself; what do you mean?"

"Well, you see Mrs. Gettling, she was the cause of all this. And I reckon, Ma'am, she just couldn't face Vance."

The cabin door opened at that moment and the Doctor came out.

"Vance hears a woman's voice and will not rest until he sees the owner of it. How do you do, Ma'am," he said bowing to Madge.

Irish motioned his arm towards her. "The other girl's sister, Mrs. Gettling, Doctor Forbes."

The Doctor reached forward and laid his hand on her arm. "Well, Mrs. Gettling, if you're like your sister, I don't want you in that cabin where my patient is. He wants nursing, not upsetting."

The result was startling, at least to the Doctor.

"You take your hands off me, Doctor; if poor Vance Colethorpe's in there, I'm going to nurse him. He's white right through and don't you forget it. If my sister has been acting up against poor Vance she'll hear from me when I've got him well. But I came to help him and help him I WILL!"

Suiting the action to the word, she pushed past the Doctor and opened Vance's cabin door, as the two men smiled and nodded to one another. "True blue, I reckon," said the Doctor, "or else I miss my guess."

"Yes, I'm mighty glad to see her. You'll have a splendid help in her, Doc. Wonder who brought her up here. We'd best see. We aren't wanted in there."

"No, and I shouldn't be surprised if I weren't wanted any more," replied the Doctor, slipping his arm in Irish's as they made for the gangway.

As the cabin door opened the man on the bed recognised the visitor, but, womanlike, she was too quick for him.

"Vance, dear boy, whatever has happened?"

"Oh, Madge, Madge! Fancy you coming up here. But it's too late; I'm ill and I've lost Linda."

Madge put her motherly arms round the agitated man. "There, there, calm yourself. Lost Linda indeed! Why, that big fellow you rescued and brought to our house, is outside your door and he told me something quite different."

Vance sat up excitedly. "Irish told you differently. What did he say, Madge? What did he say?"

She felt the hot hands and saw his fevered look and soothingly replied, "You go to sleep, old silly. Linda's not lost. Why, Mr. Irish said she had gone to find herself!"

## CHAPTER XXV

LINDA never could quite recollect that lonely drive to Grouard. The cold was lost on her. The horse realised he was homeward-bound and went forward at a good gait, while she, oblivious to her surroundings, gave herself up to thinking of the recent occurrences.

How fearfully mixed life was! Just when laughter and sunshine seemed to be forthcoming—sadness and gloom took their place.

And that man had called her a shallow and strait-laced brat! Yet she had tended him through all his sickness, and during his convalescence. What had made him dash off like that, after taking Vance's note? Men were so strange! Couldn't she have a little flirtation, even although she were engaged to Vance? Yet Vance had offered her her freedom; surely he never thought she had transferred her affection to that total stranger—so rude too—calling her a shallow, strait-laced brat. Did her attention to him show her shallowness? Did her conduct at Grouard show her up as very strait-laced? What should she have done in the face of that drunken man's accusation?

Yet how strangely that man had spoken: "Love suffereth long and is kind; taketh not account of evil. Love never faileth." It was something the priest at the Crossing had told him and he had remembered. Yes, he was, somehow, just like Corporal Mabson,

strong, tender-hearted, and true to his friends. It was the Western character that the Corporal had told her about. "Love never faileth!"

She pictured herself in that scene at Grouard once more. Oh, if she had only caught the real spirit of the West, she would not have taken any account of that evil report regarding Vance!

Poor Vance,—how deeply he must have loved her after all to have tried to follow her, despite his weakness.

She choked back her sobs as she recalled her late companion's parting words. "God help me!" she murmured. "I'm feeling the goad, as he predicted. God help me to catch the spirit of the West!"

She awoke from her reverie to find the horse climbing the bank at Grouard, and she pulled up to get some things she thought necessary for herself and Irish's home, at Revillon's store.

As she entered, a young man came forward with a surprised look on his face. "Good day, Miss, I thought you went back East with the mail-driver."

"Yes," she said meekly. "But I found I had to come West again, and I want some things to take to a sick woman."

"Somehow the West gets one, doesn't it!" he said brightly, as he packed up the goods she ordered.

"I hope it gets me!" she replied laughingly, as she went out and entered the sleigh again. The young man followed her out and deposited the stores in the sleigh.

"Where are the Police Barracks, please?" she asked as she gathered up the reins.

"Right at the further end of this trail. Anything wrong, Miss?"

"No. Yes, I mean. I want the doctor to go at once to someone who's quite ill on board the steamer."

"A newcomer?"

"Not exactly. He's been up here for some time. He broke his leg and hasn't quite got over it." Despite her efforts she blushed furiously.

"Oh, that chap. Colethorpe's his name and a blamed fine fellow. I fancy it wasn't his leg which has made him keel over; it was that lying drunken fellow, captain as was."

"Was he lying?—I mean is he a liar?" hastily correcting herself to appear uninterested.

"You bet he was a liar out and out, and a good riddance it is they found him frozen to death this morning. Mr. Colethorpe saved him from committing murder, I reckon, and because the Captain lost his job through it, he had it in for Mr. Colethorpe."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, a light bursting in upon her mind. "Then it was a lie and I believed it. Thank you so much. I must be getting on now."

Whipping up the horse, she drove off up the trail, leaving the young man standing gazing after her with a puzzled look.

She reached the Barracks; told her story to the surprised Sergeant and the Doctor, and the latter started off immediately for the steamer, taking food and necessary restoratives.

The Sergeant looked at her curiously. "Are you the young lady who is the cause of Colethorpe coming West and his sudden departure?"

She nodded her drooping head.

"Well, until you know your own mind better I should have advised you to have stayed East."

"Oh, but I couldn't, Sergeant. He wanted me and that's why I came."

"Well, you didn't seem to want him very badly when you saw him. He's a queer looking cuss right now, I admit, but he's white, white right through, and that's what counts out here."

"Corporal Mabson told me the West brought out one's character."

"You bet it does! Now what are you going to do? Why didn't you hop back with the Doc?"

"I've got to reach the farm of that man whose sleigh I'm driving, right away. His wife's sick."

"Whose? Irish's? His wife sick? Why, in Heaven's name didn't he come then and leave you to look after Colethorpe?"

"He wouldn't let me. He said I had to learn the West's great lesson before I was fit to attend to him."

The Sergeant leant forward. "Do you know where Irish's farm is?"

Linda shook her head.

"It's a good day and a half's drive from here. Do you know his wife is a breed?"

She thought for a moment, then flung her head back and replied: "I don't care, Sergeant, how far it is, or whether his wife is a breed or not, I'm going!"

"Good!" he exclaimed. "You are catching the Western spirit. Corporal Mabson will show you the way."

A call brought the Corporal out, and the Sergeant explained the errand. The Corporal saluted and jumped into Irish's sleigh followed by Linda, and they drove away.

Explanations seemed easy to give to the Corporal. He was one of those men to whom anyone would

"open up" without embarrassment. It was a great relief to Linda and it was pleasing, she admitted to herself, to hear Vance spoken of so highly.

The night came and the Corporal pitched the tent in which she slept very comfortably.

The next day passed quickly with the ever-changing view to hold one's interest. Myriads of birds flying, on their approach, from the clumps of leafless trees, surprised her. "They can't leave the West, you see," said her companion laughing.

"No, they seem to prefer the hard life; perhaps they, too, have caught the spirit of the West," she replied jauntily.

"Yes, and before you're here much longer, you will too," responded the other soberly.

"Do you really think so?" she said, now earnestly, looking into his face. "It surely is a wonderful gift."

"Let Dame Nature tell her own story to you in her own way and you'll catch it. Here we are. I'm sorry I can't stay. I must return right away, but I know you'll be alright."

"Are you taking the sleigh back too?" she exclaimed.

➤ "Sure! How otherwise can I get back? Besides Irish will want to come out as soon as he can. Good-bye."

The sleigh swung round and was soon but a speck in the distance. Linda took up the supplies and started to carry them indoors. Then she stopped as she remembered the woman was a breed, but the Sergeant's taunting words rang in her ears and she lifted the latch and walked in.

Lying on a bed was a girl. She saw she was quite good-looking, young and dark-complexioned.



"How do you do," said Linda, depositing her stores on the table.

The girl on the bed gave no answer, and Linda went over to her.

"Irish told me you are sick and I've come to help you, nurse you. He cannot come just now, he is with a sick friend. Do you understand?"

The girl nodded, and Linda continued her explanations.

"The man who saved your husband's life is sick and Irish is staying with him. He said you would understand."

"Yees, alright. White man Vance good to Ireesh."

Linda caught her throat as she heard the girl speak of Vance. "Let me help you now all I can, that's what I came for, and then perhaps you'll tell me the story of the white man, Irish and yourself on the steamer. Will you?"

The girl smiled in spite of her weakness. "Will tell you when I'm better. Ill now. White man, fine man."

A pang shot through Linda's heart. Was it of Vance this girl spoke? If so, how was he mixed up with her? If only she would tell the story! But not now. Other things were uppermost and everything must be got ready for the forthcoming event. The shack was tidied and the lamp lit, then Linda sat down for a breathing spell, when her attention was drawn to the bed and its occupant, and for the next hour or so she was busily engaged in her work of comfort and helpfulness. At the end of that time she was whispering soft lullabys to a mother who lay peacefully clasping a new life at her breast.

## CHAPTER XXVI

DAYS had passed without count to Linda, who found her time fully occupied with the household duties and the care of the new arrival. Despite her protestations, Linda had insisted on the young mother staying in bed for the appointed time in the old "Medicine and Home Doctor" book she had found, so she had ample opportunity to cuddle the wee-mite.

The tiny clinging fingers around her own strong ones, and the sense of helplessness this wee piece of humanity mutely showed, seemed to stir something hitherto unknown in Linda, and she did the chores around the little farm with a new-born spirit and fresh vigour.

She often wondered how Vance was, and whether Madge had heard of his illness and come West after all. Irish's wife was growing stronger daily, so Linda was relaxing the stern rule and allowing her to sit up in an easy chair and get a breath of fresh air now and then, while she went for short walks on the hard-crusted snow.

The veil (a mixture of strangeness on one side and pride on the other) had long since dropped from between the two girls, and Linda found that Irish was right when he said that despite her colour, Mimi was white.

How eagerly she had listened to Mimi's story about the storm and the wreck and the near tragedy

that followed. No wonder this girl-mother, with but crude upbringing, thought so highly of Vance and so tenderly of her husband. They were typically "white" men—white through and through, and as she thought of the story again and again, she felt a sense of uplifting joy in knowing these men and of having come West after all, and prayed that they might see that she was, indeed, changed.

The prairie was still, save a slight noise now and again from the farmyard. How grand it all was, and to think these people were making a Home in this Western Land. How nice, she pondered, it would be to have a Home here too. But Vance would no longer be thinking of her in that way. Yes, she had killed his affection for her. Well, she must get a home on her own account, somewhere near Mimi and Irish and live out her lonely life. If only she could take the adjoining homestead! Why do Government Regulations rule against a woman! Perhaps Mimi and Irish could help her in her desire to live out here. Yes! She would speak to Mimi about it right away.

She reached the house and stood at the door, wondering, for she heard voices within. Irish must have returned, she thought. Well, she would try and show him she had changed, as he last wished.

Entering, she found herself face to face with a jovial faced clergyman, who rose to meet her. "I was waiting to welcome you. I've been informed that you are Miss Faunch," he said in a captivating manner. "The little mother here tells me how wonderfully kind you've been. You've soon caught the spirit which animates everyone out here."

"Have I, do you really think?" she eagerly put in.

"Oh, that's what I wanted to hear so much. You see I've made up my mind to stay out West." She turned to the girl, "Mimi, dear, do you know if the adjoining homestead is open for filing on?"

Mimi's eyes widened. "I not know. We alone here. Why?"

Linda persisted. "Whereabouts—that is, Mimi—how far away from here is the dividing line between your land and the next?"

"Just leetle way from this house. Ireesh he build here for neighbours."

Linda understood and her face lightened up, but immediately became grave again. "Oh, if only I were a widow with minor children!"

Father Henthlome looked at her astonished. "What an extraordinary wish for a young girl," he exclaimed. "Why, when you have your life before you unfettered, do you wish to be bereaved and have the care and anxiety of looking after bairns?"

"Because that's the only way a man-made government allows a woman to acquire a homestead. I want the adjoining quarter section to this, but I'm not qualified to file on it. I'm fit and strong and active, yet because I'm not a broken-hearted widow struggling to keep little children, I can't get it."

Father Henthlome became thoughtful. "Suppose we ask the agent at Grouard if there's any way whereby you can get that homestead?"

Mimi's hand found Linda's. "Maybe by scrip I heard say, but if no way, you stay with us . . . dear."

Linda affectionately squeezed the hand in hers, but before she could reply calls were heard outside, and they all went out to welcome Irish and Madge. The latter's greeting of her sister was affectionate and

sincere, but the meeting between Irish and his wife and, above all—the Baby, was fine to watch. Somehow it made a lump come in Linda's throat, and she turned indoors. The priest soon afterwards entered the shack, chatting gaily to Madge, and on catching sight of Linda reverted to the conversation which had been interrupted.

"Mrs. Gettling, your sister tells us that she would like to file on the quarter section adjoining this one and build a shack close here to live in, but, unfortunately, she can't under the existing regulations. She's quite caught the Western spirit."

Irish swung round, with the baby still in his arms, and faced her. "Say, is that a joke, or do you mean it?"

"I'm in dead earnest," retorted Linda.

"You must be absolutely crazy, Linda!" put in Madge. "I couldn't understand why you . . ."

Irish's eyes stopped her.

"No, she isn't crazy," he exclaimed. "Thank Heaven she has found herself at last."

"Well, I must be going," put in Father Henthlome, rising. "I've quite a journey before me; I'm going back over the way you've just come. I'll call at the Land Office, Miss Faunch, and see if there's any way to satisfy your longing for the land."

"Could I go with you, Father?" pleaded Linda. "I'm really keen on that homestead, and I'll get back here somehow."

"Surely you may; I'll be glad of your company, and we'll get you safely here again some way or other."

"Linda," exclaimed her sister wrathfully, "You've done enough foolish things up here; don't

quite lose all your common sense. Stay and come back home with me."

She looked at Madge with a new light in her eyes. "I realize what I've done. I've lost . . . but there, I can't go back to be cramped, back East. I couldn't! I've simply got to stay out here and show them all I wronged a really white man in running away. Oh, Madge, you never said a word how Mr. Colethorpe was. Wasn't I worth even that?"

Irish caught her hand. "Do you think I'd be back here if he weren't well on the way to recovery and back in good hands?"

"Or—or dead," she whispered:

"Mercy me!" exclaimed Madge.

"I calculate I wouldn't be so happy now, if that were the case," said Irish. "And say, there's a way out of your difficulty regarding the land, Linda. A man can file on a homestead. Why not get a man to do it and then you see you can live on it in complete happiness."

"Why, Irish!" ejaculated Madge, "how could she! How could you suggest such a thing?"

Irish looked at Father Henthorne and catching a twinkle in his eye, winked solemnly.

"Father knows, I reckon, and maybe he can show Linda the way."

Linda stared at him for a moment, then blushed, and made ready for her journey.

"Oh, Father, a word before you go," sang out Irish in a happy vein; "when will you be back at the Landing?"

"In five days time, I hope. Why, my friend?"

"Because while our company's here, I want to bring baby over to be baptized in our church."

Father Henthlome returned to the mother, smiling. "Oh, is it's name chosen yet?"

"Yees, Father. Vance Ireesh Henthlome, if your Rev<sup>d</sup>rance allows."

The priest roared. "Working in all the friends, I see. Certainly, certainly. Well, I'll look after your sister, Mrs. Gettling, and in view of the important celebration to be held on my return, I will take her back to the Crossing."

The sisters looked into each other's eyes for a brief moment, then affectionately embraced, and the priest and Linda drove away.

Here was another type of the Western spirit for her inspection. A man with a pure, poetical soul who saw beauty everywhere. How she enjoyed that drive! The trees, gaunt and bare as they were, were clothed with beauty under his description. The shrubs, leafless and shivering in the icy blasts, appeared to her as emblems of tenacity and faith. All too soon they were driving down the main trail towards the Land Office in Grouard.

The quarter section in question was open for filing on, but there was apparently no loophole in the regulations and Linda came out disheartened because she could not take up the Government's wager—160 acres to \$10.00. She accompanied Father Henthlome on his little rounds in silence, then drove with him to the Crossing, her animation gone, and she was glad to seek something to occupy her in the cosy lodging he obtained for her in a near-by shack.

Father Henthlome noticed her mood. "Good night," he said cheerfully. "Never fear, we'll find a way out for you. I believe I see a solution but I

must have some more information before I can help you."

The next day found them both on the look-out for the christening party, as this would be the specified day, but the hours sped by without any sign of them. Linda was nervous. She acknowledged it to herself and ultimately to Father Henthlome. Bit by bit he extracted the whole of her story and saw the true Linda at last.

"Well, suppose, just suppose, Vance Colethorpe did come back, and suppose, just suppose, he did want you after all. What would you say to that?"

Linda stood up in her eagerness and the rays from the setting sun lit up her face, which appeared really beautiful then. "Oh, Father, I think this West would then be the dearest place on earth!"

Father Henthlome smiled. "This is God's Great West, and He is making it dear to all of His people who venture here."

He gazed at the peacock-tinged sky enraptured, and then she saw the poetic mind at work as he recorded the impression. Presently he spoke, and the beauty of his voice seemed to blend with the scene before them, as he recited in answer to her enquiring eyes:

The setting sun in an autumn sky  
Portends Decay, and that all must die.  
The cloud, red-streaked, in the view appears  
As eyes inflamed by burning tears.

The sun has sunk in a fiery sky . . .  
Hope has but left a silent sigh . . .  
Life in all Nature is quiet and frail,  
The cloud's like a corpse, lifeless and pale . . .



But Sunshine and Day shall return on the morn—  
Just like two young lives, on the wings of Love, borne,  
Linked together, though cold and dark days will ensue—  
Until their Creator shall make *all things new!*

She felt the beauty of his words and the majesty of the silence which followed them, and with a hasty handshake for a "good-night" entered her shack, leaving him absorbed in his own contemplations.

On the following day the sun betokened Happiness and Goodwill, and therefore it was a jolly party which drew up at the Rectory towards mid-day. Linda was there waiting, and eagerly took the baby from Mimi's outstretched arms as she alighted. Irish smiled at her, and everyone seemed happy.

The party wended its way towards the little church, which brought so many tender memories back to the proud parents, and Irish was busy telling Madge all about the happy event, of which he had been one of the chief participants, on that never-to-be-forgotten day.

Father Henthlome walked off with Linda to show her the magnificent view of the mighty Peace, and stood silently by her as she fell into a deep reverie. He glanced around as a sound caught his ear, smiled, and walked away, leaving Linda still in a brown study.

"Isn't it lovely!" she said at last to the figure at her side, without looking up. "It's the West and all that it stands for. I could be awfully happy here, Father, if only I could tell Vance that I believe, and realize the meaning of the words which Irish quoted, 'Love never faileth'."

The figure beside her moved and she turned.

"Vance!" she cried, flinging herself into his

outstretched arms. "Why—how did you come here?"

"I heard you were in town with my friend, Father Henthlome," he answered gently, "and I went to Irish's place yesterday . . . I knew Madge was there, and I thought you'd be with your sister . . . I wanted to see you. That's why they didn't turn up for the christening yesterday—I was there, and tired. But I can stand quite a long drive now, Linda, and . . . and *anything* after hearing you say what you did . . . Are you *sure* this time?"

She lay back in his arms and simply looking up at him murmured "Love never faileth!"

"Come, you two," sang out the hearty voice of Father Henthlome; "We're waiting."

They went hand in hand to the little church, regardless of the knowing looks awaiting them.

"Everything seems complete," said the genial priest, smiling as usual. "This will be a memorable day. Which is it to be the first, the wedding, which I've been looking forward to celebrating, or the christening? Perhaps the proud parents will allow the happy couple to take precedence and let us have the wedding first. You'll give your sister away, I suppose, Mrs. Gettling? Good. Come in, please. Come in."

The ceremony, simple as it was, duly impressed itself on all present, and then followed the christening, Mimi anxiously watching Father Henthlome as he held her tiny offspring in his strong arms.

And now it was all over, and the happy party were making the priest's shack ring with joyous laughter.

"What are we going to do now, my dear?" said Vance, as he looked lovingly round the simple place

and at the bright face of his old friend. "It's charming here, but there's the future to think about!"

Linda stood up and drew her husband over to where Father Henthlome sat.

"Father knows my wish, perhaps he will tell you."

The priest held up his hand, laughingly declining.

"I thought you might have noticed by the banks of the Peace to-day that I never come between two united hearts. You had better tell your husband yourself."

She smiled up at Vance as she said, "Let's go down home with Madge first, dear. Then you can sell or wind up your business . . . ."

Vance started. "But we can't live on love, dear, I . . . ."

She held up a protesting finger . . . . "Then we will come back and you can file on the land adjoining that of Mimi and Irish. I've grown to love it all so much out here. There, you can laugh, Father, you always seem to radiate happiness, but you know I mean it."

Vance could see that his old friend was enjoying himself greatly.

"I thought I could see a way out of your difficulty, Mrs. Colethorpe, but I wasn't sure until you told me. Yes, you can get the homestead you so much wanted now. She was very much upset because she couldn't file on it herself, Vance, but, as Irish suggested, she can get a man to do it for her, and then go and live there in happiness."

"Well, there's something in that," said Vance, highly amused. "Hullo, Irish, what do you think? Linda's urging me to pull stakes and come out West to farm alongside of you."

The big fellow bounded up and crushed her hand in his.

"You win," he exclaimed joyfully, "you win. You've caught the spirit of the West at last, Linda. And when you return you'll find a hearty welcome from us all."

The party broke up; the parents getting into their sleigh, and Vance, Linda and Madge in another, Madge, despite Linda's half-hearted entreaties, choosing to ride behind with the "other effects." Goodbyes were called and the sleighs drove away. The laughter died down in the distance, and Father Henthorne, left to himself, went indoors.

He looked around the shack, which now seemed so empty. With a sigh he took down the Old Book and settled himself to read. Then he looked up through the little window and over the valley of the Peace.

Lovingly turning the pages of the book on his knees, he saw some favourite words underlined—"The love of Christ constraineth." The old familiar smile stole over his features and his eyes were radiant once more as he caressed the book. "History is always repeating itself, it seems," he mused, "and, whether it be human or Divine, Love is ever the Goad."

THE END

